

Research into the  
use and  
effectiveness of  
Risk of NEET  
Indicators  
(RONIs)

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## About the authors

This report is based on independent, quality-assured research conducted by IFF Research and funded by the Youth Futures Foundation.



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IFF Research is an independent social research agency established in 1965, with a long-standing reputation for delivering high-quality, impactful research. IFF specialises in providing evidence-based insights to inform policy and decision-making across a wide range of sectors, including education, employment, health, environment, and social care. We pride ourselves on our impartiality, independence, and commitment to making a difference, working collaboratively with government departments, public sector organisations, and not-for-profit entities to address societal challenges and improve outcomes for communities. To learn more, visit: [www.iffresearch.com](http://www.iffresearch.com)

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# Glossary

EAL – English as an Additional Language

DfE – Department for Education

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

EHCP - Education, Health and Care Plan

FSM – Free School Meals

LA – Local Authority

MSA – Mayoral Strategic Authority

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

RAG – Red, Amber, Green

REA – Rapid Evidence Assessment

RONI – Risk of NEET Indicators

SEND - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector

# Executive Summary

The proportion of young people aged 16-24 who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) stood at 12.7% (946,000 young people) in September 2025.<sup>1</sup> Factors such as poor mental health, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), school exclusion, and low GCSE attainment are associated with an increased risk of becoming NEET.<sup>2</sup> Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) are being used by local authorities (LAs) in England to identify and support young people at risk before they leave compulsory education or training.

The Youth Futures Foundation (Youth Futures) commissioned IFF Research to conduct research into the use and effectiveness of RONIs across England, focusing on the extent and manner of their use, ability to capture risk, and effectiveness in targeting support for secondary school-aged young people (approximately age 11-16). The research included a scoping phase comprising expert interviews, a call for evidence, and a pilot literature search. Due to the scarcity of published evidence, particularly evaluations of RONI effectiveness, a case study approach was adopted in place of a full rapid evidence assessment (REA). Seven LAs, sampled by region, urban-rural classification, and NEET rate, were selected for the case studies, which were informed by interviews with LA, Careers Hub,<sup>3</sup> and school representatives. A discussion session with young people aged 15-17 on the availability and effectiveness of support was also conducted.

## Use of RONI approaches

**RONIs were implemented differently within the selected LAs**, with considerable variation in the guidance provided by LAs and the level of autonomy afforded to schools in identifying young people at risk. In some LAs, sophisticated tools incorporated live data updates and indicators from education, social care, youth justice, and health services. These tools helped initiate conversations with schools about support needs, though schools' contextual knowledge remained crucial to the risk identification process. In other areas, the risk of NEET identification relied on school-led assessment primarily, and

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<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics (November 2025) [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\), UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>2</sup> National Centre for Social Research for Youth Futures Foundation (December 2023) [Research Risk-factors-for-being-NEET-among-young-people\\_2023\\_National-Centre-for-Social-Research.pdf](#)  
RAND Europe for Youth Futures Foundation (November 2025) [REA-NEET-risk-factors\\_Final-report\\_Nov2025.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> Careers Hubs are place-based partnerships led by The Careers & Enterprise Company and local strategic bodies that work with schools, colleges, employers and training providers to improve careers education.

the RONI served as a secondary reference tool. In some of these cases, schools would have appreciated stronger guidance from the LA.

**RONIs across all case study areas included digital data sourced from schools.** Beyond educational data, most LAs included **indicators from services such as adult and children's social care and youth justice**. In a small number of LA areas, data from the NHS, the police, or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were also collected. In most cases, these datasets were integrated digitally and centralised within LA systems.

Across all areas, LAs and schools agreed that **a young person's context could never be fully captured by a RONI tool**. While the less data-driven areas relied on school input as the main source to identify risk, even the areas with the most sophisticated RONI tools incorporated schools' assessment of young people's context into the process of risk identification.

**There was variation in the cohorts targeted. RONIs were primarily used for young people in Years 10 and 11**, though some areas were expanding their use to younger age groups for earlier identification and prevention.

## Developing RONI approaches

**The RONI was quite established in most case study areas.** Only one LA began using the RONI very recently. A few case study areas had completed a formalised process of refining their RONI tool within the past couple of years, while other case study areas described more regularly reviewing their RONI.

Most case study areas accounted for local variations in risk factors in their RONI tools. The research identified some trends in indicator adjustments across the case study areas, with common recent changes including: **differentiating the weighting of the school attendance indicator** (based on attendance rates), **lowering the weighting of Free School Meal status**, or **adding new indicators based on recent demographic changes** (such as multiple moves/instability in education or refugee status).

## Effectiveness of RONI approaches

**LAs generally believed their RONIs effectively capture risk**, though challenges remained in tracking outcomes beyond age 18 and addressing gaps in data. One LA's RONI involved a machine learning model which evolved with new data. However, even very advanced tools required schools to supplement outputs with their knowledge of young people's circumstances to ensure accurate identification.

**The effectiveness of RONIs was monitored informally through meetings and reports documenting outcomes** for young people identified as at risk. While none of the case study areas had conducted formal impact evaluations of their RONIs, anecdotal evidence suggested improved support for young people since implementing RONIs. Some areas were beginning to expand their monitoring efforts, such as tracking young people's post-16 transitions, including using the Key Stage 4 destination measures, to assess the impact of interventions.

## Interventions to support young people at risk of becoming NEET

**Young people at risk of becoming NEET were usually prioritised for receiving interventions tailored to their specific needs.** In some but not all cases, interventions were selected with the Gatsby Benchmark Principles in mind. They were commonly run through schools and ranged from individual and group career advice and support with college applications to addressing broader issues such as trauma, mental health, or SEND needs.

The extent of **transition support** to help young people adapt to the shift from school to further education or work **was variable and usually provided by LA careers and re-engagement teams rather than schools.** In some areas, schools checked in with previous years' leavers to ensure they were on track and offered additional support if needed. However, many schools reported having minimal contact with their leavers during the transition summer and beyond, largely due to limited resources.

## Enablers and barriers to the use of RONIs

Key **enablers** to the use of RONIs included **skilled staff, collaboration between services, and established relationships between LAs and schools,** which facilitate data sharing and effective targeting of support. Schools also valued Careers Hub Network meetings as opportunities to share good practice around identifying young people at risk.

**Barriers** included **limited resources, patchy engagement from schools, and data-sharing challenges.** Some schools struggled to use RONI data effectively due to a lack of training or dedicated staff. Rural areas reported challenges in the availability of data on access to transport, which could improve the effectiveness of RONIs.

# 1. Introduction and context

The proportion of young people aged 16-24 who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) stood at 12.7% in September 2025 (an estimated 946,000 young people).<sup>4</sup> Long-term youth unemployment is becoming a more entrenched issue: the number of young people in the UK who have been unemployed for over six months more than doubled between 2022 and 2025, rising by 124% (from 107,000 to 240,000).<sup>5</sup> Since 2010, the proportion of young people in England who are experiencing poor mental health has risen sharply.<sup>6</sup> Since 2016, the proportion of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has also increased.<sup>7</sup> Both factors are associated with increased risk of becoming NEET, although the relationship is complex and influenced by other interlinked factors such as poor school attendance, school exclusion and low GCSE attainment.<sup>8</sup>

There is already a strong and long-standing body of evidence about the characteristics of young people who are NEET and what the 'risk factors' are, including factors such as lower educational attainment, socio-economic disadvantage, and mental health challenges. These have been most recently synthesised in an international systematic review and meta-analysis<sup>9</sup> and in a UK-focused literature review.<sup>10</sup> Being NEET is not a fixed status: many young people who become NEET at some stage move in and out of this status, some experience it for a single period, while for others it becomes more longstanding. Evidence shows that time spent NEET reduces life chances – young people experience lower future wages, a higher likelihood of unemployment and

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<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (November 2025) [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\), UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>5</sup> Youth Futures Foundation (November 2025) [Report Youth-Employment-2025-Outlook Youth-Futures-Foundation November-2025.pdf](#)

<sup>6</sup> Pierce, M. et al. for Youth Futures Foundation (July 2025) [Understanding-drivers-of-recent-trends-in-young-peoples-mental-health-July-2025-final.pdf](#)

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education (June 2025) [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>8</sup> National Centre for Social Research for Youth Futures Foundation (December 2023) [Research Risk-factors-for-being-NEET-among-young-people\\_2023\\_National-Centre-for-Social-Research.pdf](#)

<sup>9</sup> Rahmani, H., Groot, W., & Rahmani, A. M. (2024). Unravelling the NEET phenomenon: a systematic literature review and meta-analysis of risk factors for youth not in education, employment, or training. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 29(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2024.2331576>

<sup>10</sup> Russell, L., & Thompson, R. (2025). Predicting educational exclusion: A literature review of risk factors associated with early leaving from education. *European Educational Research Journal*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041251378585>

committing crime, and lower levels of physical and mental health.<sup>11</sup> Someone NEET for 3 months is 75% more likely to still be NEET after 12 months.<sup>12</sup>

The Education and Skills Act 2008 placed a statutory duty upon local authorities (LAs) to “encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training” until they are 18 years old, or 25 years old if they have an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP).<sup>13</sup> To do this LAs must “collect information about young people in their area in order to identify those who are not participating, or who are at risk of not doing so, and to target their resources on those who need them most.”<sup>14</sup> To support this policy of Raising the Participation Age (RPA), a number of local trials were implemented in the years preceding the full introduction of the RPA in September 2013.

A Risk of Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) Indicator (RONI) is a tool that uses data collected by education providers and LAs to identify young people at increased risk of becoming NEET. It involves using a list of characteristics that are associated with an increased likelihood of becoming NEET and identifying individual young people with these characteristics. Evaluation and case study research identified that many LAs started developing and implementing RONIs as part of their preparation for RPA.<sup>15</sup>

Alongside RPA, several developments have affected the post-16 education and careers guidance infrastructure in England over the past 15 years.<sup>16</sup> These include introducing a statutory duty for state-funded schools and colleges to provide careers guidance to pupils from ages 11-18. The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) has developed eight measures of good careers guidance called the Gatsby Benchmarks to improve careers guidance in schools. The CEC also coordinates a national network of Careers Hubs, which are groups of secondary schools and colleges in a local area that work together to deliver the Gatsby Benchmarks. An important school accountability metric is the Key Stage 4 (KS4) Destination Measure, which is the percentage of students staying in education or going into employment after Key Stage 4 (at age 16).

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<sup>11</sup> UCL Institute of Health Equity for Public Health England (September 2014) [Review3 NEETs health inequalities.pdf](#)

<sup>12</sup> Impetus (September 2019) [Youth-Jobs-Gap-The-Long-Term-NEET-Population.pdf](#)

<sup>13</sup> Department for Education (April 2024) [Participation of young people: education, employment and training - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>14</sup> Department for Education (April 2024) [Participation of young people: education, employment and training - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>15</sup> For example, see Maguire, S. and Newton, B. (2013) [Research into the phase 4 locally-led delivery projects for raising the participation age - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>16</sup> Long, R., Lewis, J., and McDonough, C. (August 2024) Careers guidance in schools, colleges and universities (England) [CBP-7236.pdf](#)

In January 2025, the Department for Education (DfE) published guidance for LAs on the use of RONIs,<sup>17</sup> and plans to develop an automated RONI tool which will sit within the National Client Caseload Information (NCCIS) portal.<sup>18</sup> The guidance identified key principles for an effective RONI approach, which included having centralised data, enabling effective data sharing, taking a partnership approach with schools and colleges, supporting post-16 transitions, establishing what works for whom to support young people at risk of NEET, and monitoring impact.

## The use and effectiveness of RONIs

Although there is plentiful evidence on NEET characteristics and support programmes, there is an evidence gap on how young people at risk of becoming NEET are identified, and the effectiveness of these approaches. In February 2025, the Youth Futures Foundation (Youth Futures) commissioned IFF Research to conduct a study into the use and effectiveness of Risk of NEET Indicators (RONIs) to target support for secondary school-aged young people (approximately age 11-16). The overarching research questions were:

- To what extent are RONIs currently being used and implemented across LAs in England?
- How are RONIs being used by LAs and education establishments to identify young people at risk of NEET and target support?
- How effectively do RONIs capture the risk that young people will become NEET?
- How effectively are RONIs being used to target support towards young people at risk of NEET? What are some of the challenges and barriers?
- What are the main evidence gaps?

The initial methodology was based on conducting a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), with a scoping stage to assess the feasibility, value, and potential scope of the REA, informed by a Call for Evidence and stakeholder interviews. Following the scoping stage, it was concluded that a full REA would have limited value due to the lack of published evaluations on the effectiveness of RONIs in early identification, targeting support and

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<sup>17</sup> Department for Education (January 2025) [Identifying and supporting young people at risk of NEET - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>18</sup> A national database used by local authorities in England to track young people's participation in education, employment, or training, including those who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. It is used for statutory reporting to the Department for Education.

prevention programmes. The study design was adapted to one that involved more primary data collection, based on local authority case studies (discussed in the next Chapter).

## 2. Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the study's methodology. It first details the research activities carried out as part of the scoping phase. It then outlines the methodological adaptations which were informed by the results of this phase, explaining why a case study approach was selected as more suitable than a Rapid Evidence Assessment. Finally, it describes the case study method and fieldwork.

### Scoping phase methodology

The study set out to conduct a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) on the use and effectiveness of risk of NEET indicators across England, supplemented by 8 interviews with LA RONI leads. The study began with a scoping stage to explore the existing evidence base on the use of RONIs, with a focus on published evaluations on the effectiveness of RONIs. The aim of this phase was to assess whether progressing to the REA search and review phase was feasible and valuable, or whether an alternative approach using primary research would be more fruitful in terms of addressing the research questions.

The scoping activity incorporated a pilot literature search using Google Scholar, an online Call for Evidence and 5 expert interviews across key stakeholders active in NEET policy, practice and research. The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and lasted 45 minutes for single respondents and 60 minutes for paired interviews. Interviewees included representatives from:

- the Local Government Association
- the Department for Education
- the Careers and Enterprise Company
- a representative from a voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisation that works to support young people at risk of becoming NEET
- a leading academic on school exclusions and NEET prevention.

IFF Research launched the online Call for Evidence on LinkedIn in February 2025, and Youth Futures also shared this on LinkedIn as well as in an online newsletter. The Call for Evidence gathered information about respondents' experience with the use of RONIs and their effectiveness in identifying risk and targeting support. Respondents were also asked to recommend literature on these topics. At the end of the scoping phase in March 2025, three organisations had submitted evidence through the call – a VCS organisation using RONIs in their NEET prevention programme (who we subsequently

interviewed), a representative from a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) and a representative from a LA, both working with different Careers Hubs on NEET prevention.

The Call for Evidence was relaunched in July 2025 and remained open until November 2025. It was opened 473 times (note this does not refer to openings by unique users) and received 8 responses. Table 2.1 summarises the responses, categorised by respondent type.

**Table 2.1 Call for Evidence respondents**

Type of respondent	Number of responses
LA	2
Careers Hub	1
MSA	1
FE College	1
VCS organisation	2
Individual with experience of being NEET	1

### Scoping phase findings and resulting changes to method

Based on the expert interviews, initial responses to the Call for Evidence, and pilot searches, IFF reviewed the findings and concluded that there was limited value in conducting a full REA due to a lack of published evidence, in particular a lack of evaluation of RONI effectiveness for targeting support and preventative programmes. The scoping phase uncovered a gap in published evidence about the extent of RONI use across LAs, and interviewees reported widespread and under-researched variations in practice between LAs.

In response to these findings, IFF Research and Youth Futures agreed on a revised method. In place of a REA, a case study approach was agreed as more conducive to

answering the majority of the study's research questions (with the exception of the question about the prevalence of the use of RONIs).

## Case study methodology

The revised methodology is grounded in LA-based case studies. The case study approach was designed to explore approaches to RONI use across different LAs in England. To this end, case study LAs were selected based on a range of considerations, informed by the scoping interviews and initial desk research. The aim was to achieve a spread across broad regional areas (including some that were covered by Mayoral Strategic Authorities and some that were not), DfE-published NEET and 'status not known' rates for 16–17-year-olds, and coverage across urban and more rural areas. Eight LAs were selected as case studies originally. In one area, it was only possible to interview the LA representative, and it was not possible to conduct further research due to a lack of engagement from local stakeholders. This area had a very low NEET rate compared with the national average, and it may be that this influenced stakeholders' awareness of and engagement with the topic.

Table 2.2 summarises selection characteristics for the 7 final case study LAs. The urban/rural classification was based on the ONS-published 2021 Rural Urban Classification.<sup>19</sup> The NEET rates were sourced from DfE-published statistics for 2024<sup>20</sup> and were classified as follows: Low (<3%), Average-lower (3-4.5%), Average (4.5-6%), High (>6%). The 'status not known' rates were also from the DfE-published data and were classified thus: Low (<1.5%), Average (1.5-3%), High (>3%).

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<sup>19</sup> Office for National Statistics (August 2025) [2021 Rural Urban Classification - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>20</sup> Department for Education (January 2025) [Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

Table 2.2 Case study characteristics

Case study	Region	Urban/rural <sup>21</sup>	NEET rate	Not known percentage
<b>A</b>	North	Urban	High	Low
<b>B</b>	Midlands	Urban	Average-lower	Average
<b>C</b>	South	Urban	Average	Average
<b>D</b>	North	Intermediate urban	Average	Low
<b>E</b>	South	Intermediate rural	Average-lower	High
<b>F</b>	North	Urban	Average	Average
<b>G</b>	Midlands	Intermediate urban	Average-lower	Average

The case study method was also suited to understanding data flows, data use, and how organisations work together within the NEET prevention ecosystem. To this end, each case study was based on an interview with the LA RONI Lead and up to 4 other respondents from schools or other local organisations involved in the RONI process, such as Careers Hubs.

### Case study fieldwork

IFF identified a shortlist of LAs to invite to take part in a case study and contacted them by email with information about the research. If we did not receive a direct response, emails were followed up by telephone to ascertain willingness to participate and, if so,

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<sup>21</sup> Intermediate rural areas are those that are neither predominantly rural nor urban but contain a substantial proportion of rural settlements. Similarly, intermediate urban areas are those that are mainly urban but contain a significant proportion of rural settlements.

to arrange the interview. Once LA interviews were conducted, a similar process was taken to recruit local school and stakeholder interviews, such as Careers Hubs representatives, in each LA. The IFF research team identified contacts through desk research and the Getting Information About Schools (GIAS) database and then sent email invites. If no direct response was received after several days, IFF's specialist qualitative recruiters conducted follow-up phone calls to ascertain willingness to take part, and if so, to arrange an interview. School interviewees were offered a thank-you incentive of a £50 donation for taking part.

In-depth interviews were conducted with respondents from LAs, Careers Hubs, schools, and other relevant organisations. All interviews were completed on Microsoft Teams between June and November 2025 and lasted approximately 45 minutes each, on average. Fieldwork with schools paused across the summer holiday period (July-August 2025), when teachers are not available, and restarted from mid- September onwards.

LA interviews were held with senior staff responsible for the RONI process, including roles such as Participation Managers, Careers Team Leaders, or Vulnerable Families Team Leaders. In some areas, these interviews were conducted as a paired interview with the lead manager together with another member of their team. In one LA, the interviewee was Head of Delivery at the council's contracted delivery partner, offering careers guidance and employment support to referred young people. Careers Hub respondents were Leads or Senior Advisors.

School respondents were Careers Leads or Assistant Headteachers with a remit that included NEET prevention. Due to challenges with recruiting schools and given the emerging findings on the importance of post-16 transition support, IFF and Youth Futures agreed partway through the fieldwork that Further Education (FE) Colleges would also be included in the sample. This resulted in one FE College interview.

Table 2.3 provides a summary of the number of interviews conducted across the final 7 case studies, categorised by respondent type.

Table 2.3 Overview of case study interviews

Case study	LA	Careers Hub	Schools	Total
<b>A</b>	1	1	3	<b>5</b>
<b>B</b>	1	0	2	<b>3</b>
<b>C</b>	2	0	2	<b>4</b>
<b>D</b>	1*	0	2	<b>3</b>
<b>E</b>	2	1	1	<b>4</b>
<b>F</b>	2	0	1	<b>3</b>
<b>G</b>	1* (paired interview with LA and careers hub)		4**	<b>5</b>
<b>Total number of interviews</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>

\* 2 respondents in a paired interview

\*\* one of which is a Further Education College

Interview data was thematically analysed using a structured coding process. Interview transcripts were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns in relation to the research questions. These codes were then grouped and refined through thematic analysis to generate overarching themes that captured key findings across participants.

Summary case study write-ups are provided in the appendix for detailed reference.

### Youth group discussion

To integrate young people's perspectives on the support available to them and their peers, a semi-structured discussion with members of the Youth Future Foundation's Building Futures Youth Advisory Group was carried out. This discussion took place on Microsoft Teams in July 2025 with 8 young people aged 15-17 with experience of

overcoming difficulties at school. The discussion lasted 60 minutes and covered the following topic areas:

- Support available for young people and its effectiveness
- Views on careers guidance available, including awareness of support, work experience opportunities, and post-16 transition support.

## 3. Use of RONI tools

RONI tools were implemented differently across the case study areas. There was considerable variation in the groups of young people that the tools were used to identify, the guidance provided by LAs, and the levels of autonomy afforded to schools in identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET.

### Use of RONI tools

The scoping phase found that RONIs are being used quite widely by LAs, but there was limited knowledge among stakeholders of the full extent of their use. The consensus was that use of RONIs is patchy, the factors that inform RONIs themselves vary by LA (although this was viewed as a positive, in order to reflect local circumstances), and approaches to using RONIs differ between areas.

**“They’re used in a very diverse kind of way, so ranging from local authorities adopting or promoting the use of the RONI tool quite stringently to not using it at all, and then everywhere in between. And then within that, of course, you’ve got a variety of education settings that are within that local authority that may then adapt, or use, or not use that tool, again in many different ways.” – Expert interview**

This was corroborated by the case study research, which found wide variation in the use and implementation of RONI tools, as detailed in the rest of this chapter.

Table 3.1 summarises the different ways that RONI tools were used across the case study areas (a more detailed analysis will be provided in the rest of this chapter). It shows the range of levels of autonomy of schools in identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET, as well as variance in the data used to determine risk of becoming NEET and how this was collected. In some areas, RONI outputs were produced by the LA in an LA-led process, with schools later able to input contextual information and amend the list of those identified at highest risk of becoming NEET. In other areas, the process was more school-led, with LA input coming in later to coordinate support for young people identified as at high risk. For a third group of areas, the RONI process was more collaborative between schools and LAs, who worked together to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET and deliver interventions.

Table 3.1 Summary of RONI use across case study areas

CASE STUDY AREA	SUMMARY OF RONI USE	TYPE OF APPROACH
A	<p>This LA relied on each school to identify and refer roughly 20-30 young people in Year 11 considered at risk of becoming NEET to its NEET service. The young people were RAG-rated (given a rating of red, amber or green to identify their level of risk) by schools according to their level of risk, using indicators determined by each school. This rating was then used to help the LA NEET service target support. The service tended to work with amber-rated young people, as the red-rated ones were already in receipt of support from other services for what was likely to be their NEET risk factors (such as mental health support), and therefore not in a position to engage with more general support around employment and training.</p>	School-led
B	<p>In this area the LA worked alongside a delivery partner to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET. The delivery partner was a publicly-owned social enterprise providing careers guidance, training and employment services. The LA collected data related to young people in Year 11 on a wide range of indicators, including refugee status, interaction with youth justice and social care, to identify their risk of becoming NEET. This data was shared with the delivery partner who then used it to RAG-rate the young people's risk of becoming NEET. The delivery partner led on providing and delivering support for those identified as having the highest risk.</p>	LA-led
C	<p>Responsibility for the RONI tool was shared between two teams in the LA in this area. They used a sophisticated, data-driven tool which drew on data collected automatically from a range of</p>	LA-led

	<p>LA services and systems, including youth justice, social care, and health, and was updated daily. Young people's risk of becoming NEET was assessed from Year 9, and each was given a rating between 1 and 3 based on the data collected. The LA provided schools annually with a list of all young people that received a score of 2 or 3 in Years 10 and 11. The RONI tool had recently been adjusted to better reflect common risk factors in the local area. Schools and the LA teams then delivered interventions and support to those identified as at high risk of becoming NEET.</p>	
D	<p>Schools and the LA worked together in this area to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET. The RONI in this area was referred to as a RASI (Requiring Additional Support Indicator), reflecting the LA's preference for the use of softer language. Both schools and the LA contributed data to this RONI which identified an overall risk score for each young person, considering indicators such as attendance and behaviour data, as well as softer data on the young person's circumstances. The two scores were then compared and where there was a difference between the school and LA's assessment, a discussion and review took place to reach an agreement on the young person's risk of becoming NEET. A monthly meeting occurred between the LA and schools to discuss and monitor those flagged as at risk, interventions identified and any progress made.</p>	Collaborative
E	<p>In this area, the LA used a highly sophisticated RONI, which had recently been updated. The RONI included data from youth justice, the NHS, children's and adult social care, schools, and the Department for Work and Pensions. This system enabled automated calculation of a holistic, whole family-centred RONI. RONI outputs were shared with a wide range of stakeholders,</p>	LA-led

	<p>including schools, the Careers Hub, and other LA services. The output for each young person included a list of vulnerabilities, with ratings against each, as well as suggested preventative interventions. The RONI was used with young people from Year 7 onwards to support early intervention. The LA was delivering a programme of training to support extensive use within schools. Interventions and support were then delivered by the Careers Hub and schools.</p>	
F	<p>In this case study area, referrals to careers and re-engagement services were based on collaborative conversations between LA and school staff. The LA held yearly meetings with school heads of year to discuss risk within their cohorts, starting in Year 7. These discussions were informed by a list of risk categories, such as having an EHCP or involvement with youth justice, but also by school staff knowledge of each young person's contextual circumstances. Both the LA and the schools contributed data to the discussion. The LA staff and the school staff worked together to decide on the level of risk for each young person and appropriate support interventions.</p>	Collaborative
G	<p>The LA collected data from schools and social care services and used this to determine a risk of NEET rating for the young people in this area. Indicators used included school attendance, social care data, and instability in education, identified through multiple school exclusions or moves. The LA shared a spreadsheet with schools identifying those at risk of NEET from Years 7 to 11 in April each year. The RONI tool had been reviewed and revised in recent years and was piloted with a small number of schools before being rolled out more widely.</p>	LA-led

## Role of the RONI

There was significant variation in the role played by the RONI in the risk identification process. Some areas, such as LA-C and LA-E, used a sophisticated data-driven RONI tool to identify risk. These LAs collected data from schools and other stakeholders, manipulated the data to weight for each indicator, and shared output data with schools. In LA-C, weighting was adjusted based on a RONI review process, which included gathering feedback from the users of the RONI data. In LA-E, the weighting of each indicator was determined by machine learning, as the RONI tool learned from data on previous cohorts of young people. The LAs subsequently requested that schools input their contextual knowledge of young people, such as issues in the family or the level of support a young person is receiving from their family, and amend the list of young people identified as at risk of becoming NEET. These areas reported finding the RONI data to be a useful tool for starting conversations with schools around support needs and provision.

**“It just helps us build a picture of that client and kind of say to the school, we feel that these young people need to be identified for support, especially when they leave Year 11.” – LA-C**

In some areas, the decision on risk of becoming NEET for each young person was made collaboratively between schools and the LA, during regular meetings, the frequency of which varied between case study areas. Schools and the LA shared information informally about the young people during these meetings to identify their risk of becoming NEET.

**“We haven't got anything formalised for the RONI process... It's something that we've done without realising we're doing it, if you know what I mean. We've kind of got an informal way of working out where our risk of NEET is.” – LA-F**

Other areas relied primarily on school assessment of young people's risk, requesting direct referrals from schools. In the cases where schools led on referrals, the RONI served as a list of potential risk factors, i.e. a reference tool used by the school and/or LA. This contrasted with the case study areas where data was generated and manipulated by the LA, and a list of young people potentially at risk was provided to schools for assessment.

**“I got in touch with one of our [LA careers team] and I said can you explain to me what process you do, what you have to identify RONI, and he just put ‘they’re identified in the schools, each school is different. We leave it to the schools as you know the pupils better than us.’” – LA-A**

Two of the LAs which relied on school referrals mentioned they had previously used a broad set of RONI indicators but found this ineffective, often flagging up false positives. For example, when they were relying on eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) as a key indicator, they found that too many young people were incorrectly identified as at risk of becoming NEET. For this reason, they decided to move to a more school-led approach based on school knowledge of a young person and their family, as well as of what support is already being provided.

**“It’s generally the schools that identify the risk of NEET young people. Previously we used to ... look at [broad indicators] like are they looked after children, are they [on] free school meals etc. However, we found that not all those young people will be risk of NEET, so we’ve changed the service so the schools identify 20 to 30 young people for us to work with.” – LA-A**

Variation across areas also extended to terminology, with one LA, LA-D, terming their RONI a RASI (Requiring Additional Support Indicator). This LA reported that the use of softer language had positive effects on attitudes towards wider work around NEET with LAs, school staff and pupils.

### **Extent of use**

RONIs were used across most case study areas to identify risk in young people in Years 10 and 11, prior to their post-16 transition. Some LAs mentioned that additional focus was given around GCSE results time to help identify young people in need of support based on the grades that they have achieved.

However, a number of case study areas were expanding the use of their RONI to Year 9 and, in some cases, even Year 8 and Year 7 to facilitate early prevention. These areas also appreciated the importance of ongoing monitoring, given that a young person's risk of NEET could change over time. In LA-E, the RONI was in the process of being

expanded for use with children in primary schools, from Year 6, and in LA-G, the use of the RONI had been expanded to middle schools (Years 5 to 8). In these areas, the LAs felt that the earlier they could put intervention support in place, the more successful this could be in mitigating the risk of becoming NEET. On the other hand, using the RONI with younger year groups did not always mean that interventions began earlier. In LA-A, whilst schools using their own approaches to identify and support young people at risk of becoming NEET were doing so with younger age groups, the LA's risk of NEET identification and support was focused solely on Year 11 pupils due to resource constraints. Another LA had identified the young people they deemed at risk of becoming NEET from Year 9, but it was up to schools to decide when to deliver interventions and support. The schools interviewed for this study had continued to focus on young people in Year 10 or 11.

**“I look at Year 10 as well, at the start of Year 10. But that is for me rather than, it's for my awareness rather than for intervention. So I will start putting intervention in place from Year 11 using RONI.” – School, LA-C**

The extent of use in each case study area was also linked to the level of careers resourcing within schools. Some of the schools interviewed had dedicated internal careers leaders or a careers team. Representatives from these schools said that this enabled them to build stronger relationships with their pupils than they had previously experienced with external careers providers who worked across multiple schools. In some areas, where previously careers advisers worked externally to the school and visited infrequently, the use of RONI tools had grown when the role was taken on within the school. In all schools interviewed, career leads took responsibility for the RONI process, whether they had a dedicated careers role or took on careers alongside other areas of responsibility (for example, teaching or pastoral care).

### **Input data collection and sharing**

Many of the case study LAs had established data sharing agreements and formalised data sharing routes for collecting input data from schools and other services. All areas reported that informal school knowledge of a young person's situation and level of support was an important source of information, in both the more and less data-driven RONIs.

## RONI input data

RONIs across all case study areas included data sourced from schools (this is explored in detail in the section 'Indicators used' in Chapter 4). LAs typically requested this data to be shared at a particular point in the school year. The timing of this varied between case study areas.

**“Most of the data actually comes in from schools. ... all the data on their pupils, the attendance, free school meals and everything to do with that. ... But then it's then manipulating it in a way that schools aren't manipulating it. So we're changing around and we're pulling in some extra information from our other systems, for instance, from our social care system.” LA-G**

Beyond educational data, most case study areas included indicators from services such as adult and children's social care and youth justice. In a small number of LA areas, where significant work had gone into developing secure data-sharing agreements, data from the NHS, the police, or the Department for Work and Pensions were also collected. This data identified health needs of young people, especially mental health; whether they were recorded as having been a victim or perpetrator of crime; and whether their family had received employment-related benefits. In most cases, these datasets were centralised within LA systems. In the most data-driven case study areas with more sophisticated RONI tools, the data indicators were live and updated on a daily basis, so a young person's RONI rating could change overnight.

To allow for such data sharing, LAs set up data sharing agreements with schools and other support services. LA respondents mentioned the setup of these agreements could be time-consuming but was essential for the development and use of an effective RONI tool.

**“We've got data sharing agreements embedded within both the city and county contracts. So, for example, the team that work with electively home educated young people can share all of the data on their Year 11s, social care can share their data, youth justice can share their data.” – LA-B**

In other areas, the RONI tool only included data supplied by schools. This was predominantly the case where LAs relied upon schools to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET. In these areas, schools noted the limited data input coming from the LA and felt this was a gap in their RONI process.

**“I think there's very limited sharing of information from the local authority. And I think when I look at what other local authorities do, and they share the information about the family and the demographics, we don't do that in this area. And I think that's a huge gap, massive gap.” – School-A**

### **Contextual assessment by schools**

Across all areas, LAs and schools agreed that a young person's context could never be fully captured by a RONI tool. As a result, all case study areas factored school input about a young person's circumstances into the RONI process.

LAs mentioned circumstances such as bereavement or parental divorce, especially during key transition periods, as important factors affecting risk of becoming NEET, but which cannot be captured by the RONI. On the other hand, LAs also mentioned young people flagged by RONI, but who are actually not deemed at risk by their schools, for example, because they have a supportive family or are already accessing a support service.

As mentioned, the less data-driven areas relied on school input as the main source of identification of risk. However, even the case study areas which used sophisticated RONI tools to calculate risk supplemented these calculations with schools' assessment of a young person's context.

**“We use that RONI data in a kind of exploratory way to help the schools make sure they are identifying the right young people and putting forward for support the ones who are going to need it the most. But as I say, we do get them to consider those wider pupils as well because they know their students best.” – LA Careers Team-C**

The RONI tools used in the most sophisticated data-driven LAs, such as LA-C and LA-E, contained clear caveats alongside their output to emphasise the importance of schools' contextual knowledge of the young people.

**“What we say when we do any training on this model is, it's only there as a guide. It doesn't replace your professional knowledge of that child or individual on the ground.” – LA-E**

These LAs also incorporated schools' assessment into the risk of becoming NEET identification process. For example, LA-C ran the RONI calculations for Year 10 and 11 pupils, identifying three levels of risk (levels 1-3) and sharing a list of those at levels 2 and 3 with schools. Schools then had the opportunity to assess, amend, and return the list of young people at risk of becoming NEET to the LA. Schools valued this opportunity to input into the RONI.

**“I think there's a lot to be said about the relationships we have with our students and knowing that actually, yeah, they're going to apply to college and they're going to be fine. I think that's something that you can't always see on paper just with the pure data. I think actually working in tandem with the data along with a more holistic approach is actually quite important” – School-C**

The role of schools in identifying young people at risk across all case study areas suggests that there is currently no all-encompassing data-driven approach that eliminates schools' need to add their knowledge of individual young people. Whether the RONI is highly sophisticated or rudimentary, the schools' input into the process was critical.

### **RONI output data sharing**

Stakeholders in the scoping interviews discussed the importance of the 'usability' of the data and how it was shared back with schools. They underlined the importance of sharing the data in an accessible way and in a way that schools could then use to help target support, otherwise use would be limited.

How RONI output data was generated and shared varied considerably across LAs. The less technologically sophisticated systems involved simple RAG ratings based on conversations between the school, LA, and potentially other relevant support services.

Other LAs ran simple calculations and provided schools with Excel spreadsheets, with % risk scores, or scores on a scale from 1 to 3 or 4.

The most sophisticated tools allowed stakeholders year-round access to data hubs that showed live data and RONI scores. In such cases, the LA still shared output data with schools at a set time in the school year. Whilst some schools were aware of their access to live data on the risk of becoming NEET, they typically waited for the annual list to be provided by the LA before acting upon the information. In some areas, these lists were RAG rated based on the severity of risk but also provided additional granularity of factors. LA-E's data output also provided schools with suggestions for possible interventions tailored to each young person based on their unique make-up of risk indicators. The types of interventions delivered are explored in Chapter 6.

**“We produce all the reports for individual schools for all their years. So they will have their Year 10s and Year 11s and we send it out around about April time every year. And that’s hopefully early enough for them to have it ready for next year’s Year 11 so they have the full year to work with them.” – LA-G**

When schools received the RONI output, they shared this internally, typically with senior leadership and pastoral care teams, to facilitate the coordination of support for the young people at risk of becoming NEET. However, a small number of school careers leaders did not share the data with additional school staff due to concerns it could lead to preconceptions around the young people, rather than an opportunity for further support.

**“I won't necessarily share this back with [other school staff] because I don't want to, I don't want for people to have misconceptions or preconceptions rather. So for that, yeah, for that reason, I won't necessarily share. And also they don't, I guess they don't necessarily need this information, they need to tell me. I need to know because I will be the one putting that intervention in place.” – School-C**

LA-E described their ongoing training programme across all schools to support their use of the RONI data, which involved demonstrations of the RONI output data and how it

should be interpreted. Similarly, LA-G offered schools individualised support to help them interpret and work with the RONI data, by visiting schools twice per year to discuss the content of the RONI report and answer any questions the school may have. This LA also recently expanded the RONI report recipients to careers leaders and advisors, compared with only senior leaders, to encourage wider use of the data.

Ongoing discussions between schools and LAs were happening in many case study areas. These existed to capture young people whose risk of becoming NEET becomes apparent after the date of RONI data sharing, as well as to capture any young people missed by the RONI tool. Some respondents identified what they referred to as the 'invisible middle', i.e. those young people who did not meet the RONI markers but still required support, as a particular group which needed to be identified for support based on contextual information and discussions.

**“We do also have those conversations to explore those invisible middle who might not hit those markers but actually are still requiring support as well.” – LA-C**

Some LAs also shared the RONI data with other support services within the LA, such as Careers Hubs or Education Welfare Officers. In some areas, LAs or schools also shared the output data with post-16 providers to inform the delivery of transition support.

Where post-16 providers were aware of which young people had been at high risk of NEET, they were able to put in place transition plans alongside schools, such as gradual increases to the post-16 timetable or referral to support services available within the post-16 provider before enrolment. The Careers Hub in LA-E delivered a series of transition panels throughout the year, including staff from schools and local colleges, to discuss how to support young people who had been identified as at risk of becoming NEET. This is because colleges felt they could play a role in preventing those young people from becoming NEET, indicating a shared commitment to young people's outcomes in the area.

**“We originally started the transition panels in response to all our colleges telling us that if only they'd known about the vulnerabilities of some of their young people before they reached college, they thought they could have saved them from dropping out because they could have been better prepared for them...we**

include the local college [in the transition panel for] the area they're involved." – Careers Hub, LA-E

## 4. Development of RONI tools

The development of RONI tools took different trajectories in different areas. Some tools were specific to the local context of the area, accounting for feedback provided by schools, whereas others were more generic. All RONI tools in the case study areas had a number of indicators in common, though there was some variation in the use of others. This variation was sometimes due to data availability.

### Developing RONI tools

The RONI was quite established in most case study areas, with several mentioning it being used for over a decade. Only one area began using their particular RONI tool very recently, though they had used a more rudimentary approach previously. A few case study areas had completed a formalised process of refining their RONI tool within the past couple of years. This process included gathering feedback from schools, the LA Careers Team, and other support services on how effectively the tool was capturing young people's risk of becoming NEET and adjusting the indicators and their weighting accordingly, as explored further below. The purpose of this was to simultaneously avoid young people at low risk of becoming NEET being identified for additional support and ensure that those at high risk of becoming NEET were being identified and offered appropriate interventions. Two LAs were able to make use of external funding to facilitate this review process.

Other case study areas described more regularly reviewing and developing their RONI, sometimes based on observations of what was happening in the local area and others based on reviewing published evidence on risk of NEET indicators. One LA that responded to the Call for Evidence described how they reflected on the characteristics of the young people that were referred to a particular intervention, and where there was a common characteristic amongst the young people, they considered adding this to their list of RONI indicators.

In the areas with highly sophisticated and data-driven RONI models, like LA-E, models used machine learning to adjust the weighting of different risk factors over time as new data was added, for example, on destinations and NEET outcomes. With each new cohort of data on those identified as NEET and their risk factors added into the model, it could more accurately calculate the relative significance of risk factors. As a result, this LA expected the model to become more effective in identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET over time. However, they continued to emphasise the need for schools

to input their knowledge and understanding of young people into identifying risk of NEET and subsequent targeting of support.

### Indicators used

As discussed, most case study areas included indicators from both education and other settings in their RONI tools, thereby enabling a holistic approach to risk assessment. For example, LA-G's previous RONI tool included only education and deprivation data, but its updated tool includes social care data as well; the LA reported that this has helped refine its effectiveness.

The research identified some trends in the inclusion and weighting of risk of NEET indicators across the case study areas. The most common indicators used in RONI tools across all case study areas were those related to education, which were collected through schools. A number of case study areas, though not all, were also incorporating data collected from the LA into their RONI tool. Table 4.1 lists the indicators used from the most to least common.

**Table 4.1 Commonality of indicators used in RONI tools across the case study areas**

<b>MOST COMMON INDICATORS (used across all case study areas)</b>	<b>COMMON INDICATORS (used in 3-6 case study areas)</b>	<b>LEAST COMMON INDICATORS (used in 1 or 2 case study areas)</b>
Eligibility for FSM	Involvement of Youth Justice	Young Carer
SEND status and EHCP	Young Parent	Accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services support
School attendance	Looked After Child	English as an Additional Language (EAL) status
School exclusions or suspensions	Engagement with Early Help or assigned Social Worker	Educational attainment/predicted grades

Multiple school moves
Victim of crime
Attended Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)
Engagement level in post-16 careers support
Level of parental engagement in young person's education
Household in receipt of benefits
Risk of exploitation
Health indicators

Several case study areas had made changes and adaptations to their RONI approach, including adjusting the indicators included. These were mostly adaptations informed by assessment of how effective the indicators were, as discussed in the section on monitoring effectiveness of RONI tools in Chapter 5. Recent changes to RONIs included:

- In one area, changing the weighting of the school attendance indicator based on attendance rates, rather than using a simple 'above or below 90%' attendance criterion. This was because the case study area had identified that more severely absent young people had a higher risk of becoming NEET than those whose attendance was around 90%, and wanted the RONI to capture this nuance. They added a new category of 'below 50% attendance', which was weighted more highly in an individual's risk of becoming NEET calculation than those in the '50% to 90% attendance' category.
- Lowering the weighting of Free School Meal status, where this was not observed to be a strong indicator of risk of becoming NEET in one area.

- Excluding demographic indicators, such as ethnicity or gender, which were not seen to impact RONI outcomes.
- Incorporating a Multiple moves / Instability in education indicator, as this had been identified as a key indicator in one case study area.
- Adding refugee status where this was increasingly seen as an indicator in one area.

A couple of case study areas mentioned having to remove effective indicators from their RONI due to not being able to access the input data, such as predicted or achieved qualifications where schools did not provide this. Some also missed data which did not exist, such as data on access to transport.

One LA that contributed to the Call for Evidence mentioned that their RONI accounted not only for risk factors but also for indicators of likelihood of the effectiveness of support. For example, the LA identified that the young people at risk of becoming NEET who engaged most effectively with the support on offer had a particular range of school attendance rates. This measure was then added to the RONI as an indicator of how likely the young person would be to engage with and benefit from the NEET prevention support available.

## **Adaptations to local context**

Some LAs initially adopted RONI tools from another LA and gradually adapted them to their area's context over time. LAs were aware of the importance of tailoring approaches to identify and mitigate the risk of NEET.

**“Young people within the different boroughs, they require a different approach slightly. What works for one borough might not always work for another.” – LA, scoping phase**

One example of adaptations made is LA-D, which identified that young people with SEND made up a high proportion of their NEET young people, so they decided to weight SEND status and EHCP highly in the identification of those at risk of NEET. A further example is LA-C, where a systematic review of the RONI undertaken by the LA Careers Hub, Vulnerable Tracking team and Supporting Families team resulted in adjustments to the weighting of different indicators based on the area's growing understanding of how these affect NEET risk in their specific locality.

**“We reduced the free school meal [indicator] because we felt that actually quite a lot of pupils in [our area] were eligible for free school meals, so it wasn't necessarily a huge indicator of being risk of NEET. We added exploitation risk factors, so this is both criminal or sexual, and we did then divide that into high, medium and low because actually in [our local area], most of the children who are on child protection plans or child in need plans are high risk of Child Criminal Exploitation or Child Sexual Exploitation. So we felt that that was an important factor to bring into the equation. You can see there's some adaptations there made between exclusions. Because again, [our local area] has quite high exclusion rates, although it is reducing.” – LA Careers Team-C**

Machine learning models like those used in LA-E are one way that RONIs can be adapted to the local context, since the model has been trained using data from local cohorts of young people, and weights risk of NEET factors accordingly. A tool like this could easily be adapted to be used in different areas, although it would need to be trained with data from young people in that specific area.

In case study areas where schools used their own approach to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET, each tool was developed and tailored to the particular context of that school. For example, the RONI used in one special school in LA-A was specific to the circumstances of its particular cohort of young people. If only the most common indicators had been used, such as FSM eligibility or SEND, the entire cohort of pupils would be identified as at high risk of NEET, making it difficult for the school to know where to focus support and which 20-30 young people to refer to the LA's NEET support service. Another school had purchased a RONI tool from the Times Educational Supplement (TES) as a starting point and had adapted it to suit their ways of working and the data they had about their cohort of young people.

## **Accounting for feedback from schools**

In some case study areas, LAs gathered regular feedback from schools to continue ongoing development of their RONI. In LA-C and LA-E, where the RONI tools used were

more sophisticated, the LAs described being open to feedback from schools and regularly adjusted their RONIs in line with this.

**“They have managed to tweak the parameters slightly, ready to make it more accurate given the sort of information we’ve got from schools.” – Careers Hub-E**

In LA-G, the newly updated RONI tool was piloted with a small number of schools that provided feedback for its development prior to it being rolled out with all schools.

**“I think from our perspective because we’ve just recently changed it and ... the feedback we got from all the pilot schools was that the accuracy is improved greatly not only in, you know, really flagging the [young people] that schools have concerns about, but also identifying ones schools felt were flying under the radar because they were focusing on other children as well.” – Careers Hub-G**

Case study areas with RONIs that have become embedded over the longer term reported accounting for feedback from schools in a more ad-hoc way, and adapting the RONI tool as and when needed.

### **Use of the DfE guidance on RONIs**

When asked about their use of the Local Authority good practice guidance<sup>22</sup> published by the Department for Education in January 2025, all LAs were aware of it. Most, particularly the ones with more developed RONI tools, checked their practice against it, largely finding that they were already complying with the recommendations. This suggests that the guidance could be of use to those LAs which are still setting up their RONI processes.

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<sup>22</sup> Department for Education (January 2025) [Identifying and supporting young people at risk of NEET - GOV.UK](#)

“I had a quick read of it, and I did think it’s kind of what we’re doing. I was kind of reassured when I read it and thought I don’t think there’s anything here that we’re not already doing.” – LA-F

## 5. Effectiveness of RONI tools

None of the LAs included in this study had conducted full impact evaluations of their RONIs, but schools said that they would like to conduct these. While RONIs have not been independently/externally evaluated, the review and updated activities in some areas indicate that appraisals and assessments of the effectiveness of RONI instruments were taking place, though in many cases this process was still in its early stages. Effectiveness was usually determined by outcomes, i.e. the NEET status of young people in their post-16 transitions or once they reach the age of 18. In general, LAs and schools were positive about the impact of using RONI instruments.

LAs and schools generally felt that their RONI was effectively capturing risk and had become more effective as partnership working and data quality improved. LAs which had recently undergone a review process updating their RONIs based on feedback from users were particularly positive about their tool's effectiveness. These assessments were largely based on feedback from schools and other RONI users, or on anecdotal evidence on young people's post-16 transitions.

### Views on the effectiveness of RONIs

The case study LAs were unanimous in their feeling that their RONIs, while not perfect, were effectively capturing risk. Some LAs were able to review their RONI process and reported that RONIs were working effectively in their areas. Schools that had used RONIs for longer periods also noted a correlation with falling numbers of their pupil populations becoming NEET, though they did not feel they had the evidence to prove causation.

**“Very few now fall through those gaps [to become NEET] than previously, than before we implemented it.” – LA-D**

**“We've got a very high percentage of Year 11s that will be in a positive outcome after leaving school in November, you know, you're talking about 98 upwards to 99 percent.” – LA-D**

As noted previously, many LAs saw RONIs as a starting point, but felt that these needed to be supplemented by wider information from schools and other local stakeholders to effectively identify risk.

**“It's ever changing and we're still reliant on that information being shared by other professionals as well. So I think it is a helpful tool to use with the schools, but I still feel that that conversation with the school is an essential part of that as well.” – LA Careers Team-C**

Respondents also noted that using RONIs helped them to identify young people who are doing well at school but may have unknown risk factors. School staff thought these were likely to be young people who were still performing reasonably well at school, with only subtle changes in behaviour and attitude. These young people may not necessarily be picked up without the RONI.

**“I think [the best parts of RONI] is the ones where it's not obvious. So they are attending school, they're bubbling along nicely in school if you pull it out their data in terms of what's going on. But actually there might be something else that's happening.” – LA-G**

Some schools said that RONIs had been effective as a way of verifying their own NEET prevention processes that followed similar processes to a RONI, and supporting the work of career leads and pastoral staff. In several cases, staff in schools would compare the outputs of the RONI with their own work and observations. Cross-referencing in this way added an extra layer of verification.

**“It is effective. I think I'm probably equally effective, but it's quite good to kind of sense check as well.” – School-C**

Where RONIs were perceived as less effective, the issues raised by schools and LAs related more to wider difficulties in assessing whether somebody was at risk, rather than the tools or approach itself. Some referenced the starkness and unpredictability of transition, marked by the shift from a school environment with lots of support to a more independent environment in FE college or 6<sup>th</sup> form, and how there was no way to predict if somebody who was currently not at risk could become at risk in the future. Others felt that some indicators were simply too subtle to be captured by the RONI, such as a subtle dip in motivation for learning.

LAs and schools were mindful that they should not be complacent and that there is always work to be done to ensure that all attempts are being made to identify risk. They shared a general feeling that there will always be a danger of risk going unnoticed, but

the use of RONIs, particularly when embedded within a school system and used alongside softer data and nuanced behavioural patterns, continued to lower the risk of anybody being missed.

**“Every child is unique and we can't predict for every child, because of those factors that we can't pull in, that softer data that I mentioned earlier. But yeah, I think it's working well.” – LA-E**

### **Measuring the effectiveness of RONIs**

In line with the findings of the scoping stage of the study, no case study LAs had commissioned independent evaluations of their RONI tools, nor had they published findings on the effectiveness of their RONIs. That being said, several of the LAs had conducted internal reviews of their RONI tool and processes, usually based on feedback gathered from school and LA Careers Service staff using the tool.

In a more data-driven assessment, a handful of case study LAs drew on post-16 destinations data to monitor the effectiveness of their RONI. Some LAs shared leavers' destinations data with schools. For example, LA-C shared a list of those leavers who did not appear on roll at any post-16 provider in September, followed in November by full 'sustained destination' data, i.e., an overview of the support received by leavers and their outcomes. This helped both the LA and the schools to understand the effectiveness of the RONI process. Data on outcomes became harder to access once young people reach 18 (i.e. at the end of Year 13), which made it harder to track the effectiveness of the assessment of risk and subsequent interventions.

**“I think after that [Year 13] there are different tracking mechanisms, but that's probably where it becomes relatively fragmented.” – LA-B**

Most LAs created reports of their referrals for young people needing support and documented post-16 outcomes. The level of detail of these reports varied. Some were as simple as detailing the percentage of young people who moved into positive destinations and those who were still NEET. Others included information on which interventions were actioned and by whom, and measured scores before, during and after the intervention for key metrics like attendance, academic performance, and behaviour.

In some cases, sharing this report was the end of the review process. Other areas held more detailed reviews and discussions on how well the identification of risk and interventions had worked. LAs and schools held case review meetings to monitor this.

Some schools also produced reports assessing how effectively individual cases had been managed, and subsequent discussions were conducted between relevant parties, including teachers, heads of year, SEND staff, and social workers, all of whom would contribute to reviews of decisions and actions taken.

One school reported that measuring the effectiveness of their RONI approach was challenging because their NEET figures were increasing due to external factors, such as the local economic situation and limited job opportunities.

**“It’s a little difficult at the moment because our NEET figures are very high, which is not necessarily something that RONI could predict as such, because that’s more due to outside factors. So that I’m not sure whether that would skew our results.” – LA-G**

Several schools and LAs had a strong desire to do more to measure and improve the effectiveness of RONIs, but they said that a lack of staff time and funding made that challenging.

**“One of the things we’d like to do is, we’re in the second year [of revising the RONI] now, try and do some work around identifying who became NEET last year and what their RONI was and try and do a piece of work around that. I mean, our own resource to do that has limited us in doing that, but ultimately that’s what we’d like to do.” – LA-G**

## 6. Interventions to support young people identified as at risk of NEET

In most of the case study LAs, RONIs played a key role in identifying young people who needed support and in deciding what support to give and how to deliver it. Where possible, interventions were planned and delivered with practitioners making sure that they were tailored to a young person's needs. In some cases, interventions were provided based on the specific indicators of risk that were flagged. In general, interventions were taken with the Gatsby Benchmark Principles in mind,<sup>23</sup> which propose that schools focus on embedding careers in school leadership and offer personalised support for all pupils.

Table 6.1 below gives an overview of the interventions in place in each case study area and who delivers them. Further detail is provided in the rest of this chapter and in the case study write-ups at the end of this report.

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<sup>23</sup> See [Gatsby Benchmarks Explained](#). Updated in May 2025, these benchmarks focused on five key themes:

1. Placing careers at the heart of education and leadership.
2. Ensuring inclusion and impact for every young person.
3. Providing meaningful and varied encounters.
4. A sharper focus on data and information.
5. Increased engagement with parents and carers.

Table 6.1 Interventions delivered in case study areas

CASE STUDY AREA	SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS	WHO DELIVERS
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA offers one-to-one careers advice to young people identified as being at risk of NEET, from February of Y11.</li> <li>• Careers Hub offers programmes to raise aspirations, including careers advice, a careers fair, and specific work with young people in Alternative Provision.</li> <li>• Support from schools includes employability lessons, assistance with college or training enrolment, and interview support. One school offers mentoring programmes.</li> </ul>	School / Local Authority / Local Careers Hub
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailored support plan, developed in an initial assessment meeting between the delivery partner and young person, including support from professionals brought in to assist as needed.</li> <li>• Drop-in careers advice service, and a website dedicated to offering support outside of meetings.</li> </ul>	LA-funded delivery Partner
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA-run careers workshops.</li> <li>• Supporting Families Link Coordinators support schools in fortnightly meetings.</li> <li>• Careers support from the Local Authority.</li> </ul>	School / Local Authority
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible model including careers advice, workshops, health support and counselling.</li> <li>• Mental health support and referrals</li> <li>• Gradual transition programme into college</li> </ul>	Local Authority / FE College

E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health support</li> <li>• Mentoring programmes</li> <li>• Trips to FE colleges</li> <li>• Service offering support with applications has recently closed due to lack of funding.</li> </ul>	School / Local Authority
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastoral support</li> <li>• Careers advice</li> <li>• Intensive re-engagement service</li> </ul>	School / LA
G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings with career advisors</li> <li>• Internship sessions</li> <li>• Sessions run in school by Careers Hub</li> <li>• Support for those dropping out of college</li> </ul>	School / Careers Hub / LA

## Identifying interventions

Once a RONI identified a young person was at risk, the school or LA would then gather additional information and decide the best course of action. This often involved contacting other relevant stakeholders and discussing what support was already in place, which, in some cases, was deemed sufficient.

Schools and LAs reported that more contextual information was often required to identify appropriate interventions. In some cases, schools would meet with the young person's key worker if they had a history of social care, or a member of the youth justice service if the young person was known to them, to get a better understanding of the young person and decide collectively what support should be put in place. They might need academic support, help at home, or support in developing social and life skills.

**“[It’s about] finding the reasons behind. Is it social? Is it simply the fact that the person you used to come on the bus with has moved schools and now you're afraid to go on the bus, so you're not coming because your friend's left? Is it because your parents have no background of being involved in education? So, finding that out.” – LA-E**

Meetings with schools were often informed by wider data, with LAs or charities sharing regional or national data to help with comparisons and to suggest courses of action that had proved successful elsewhere. These tended to be LAs working with manual systems and limited information that they looked to supplement.

**“So that's our job, is to work with the schools around those data sets. We do provide them with the comparisons of regional and national as well and talk to them.” – Careers Hub-A**

### **Delivering interventions**

The type and length of interventions varied widely, both within and across LAs. Some examples of support delivered included:

- Coaching sessions, which may include CV writing, interview practice or the development of other soft skills.
- Careers advice, such as which qualifications or courses would be suitable for appealing careers.
- Setting goals or targets for young people.
- Support with applications for jobs, FE or HE.

Interventions were commonly provided through schools. LAs shared a RONI report, and then the school would take the appropriate action, usually through tailored school-based careers support through the Careers Hub, and often working with DWP and the job centre.<sup>24</sup>

**“What we do is we send out that RONI report to schools and the schools then look through it and then action as appropriate.” – Careers Hub-G**

In the instances where Careers Hubs were working with RONI data, interventions were more likely to be around providing opportunities to experience further study or work, such as work experience placements or college visits.

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<sup>24</sup> Jobcentre Plus has taken on a role to support young people at risk of NEET. See Department for Work and Pensions (April 2018) Evaluation of Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme National roll-out evaluation. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5abd01e8ed915d44eb7e697a/evaluation-of-jobcentre-plus-support-for-schools-programme.pdf>

The Building Futures Youth Advisory Group discussed the availability and effectiveness of careers guidance in schools and support available. They highlighted variations in the quality and scope of careers support across different schools, with some students having access to comprehensive programmes while others received limited assistance. The group felt that these kinds of interventions (notably college visits and work experience) were more likely to be delivered to high-performing students, i.e. those who were achieving academically and were more likely to go on to higher education, would receive greater support and access to career coaching or college/university visits than those who were struggling more.

**“So it’s [focus on high-achieving students], it’s really like a disadvantage to other people who want to go to university and it’s only for like the high achieving students.” – Building Futures Youth Advisory Group**

As well as trying to help young people find their next step into education or work, some interventions were designed to help young people get ready more broadly for adult life and independent living.

**“Another [course] in which you’ll have a feature of life skills such as cooking and baking just to kind of boost independence.” – LA Careers Team-F**

Some interventions included being allocated a dedicated worker to build a relationship. This was often an in-house member of staff or a visiting careers lead who would talk a young person through their options and regularly check in to support and advise. The level of support varied depending on the needs of the young person, for example, somebody with a new EHCP would have more regular reviews.

In some LAs, the interventions were run by a different organisation, normally a charitable organisation, depending on the funding and resources available or partnership agreements in place. In a couple of cases, schools worked with charities where workers would come into the school to run sessions, or they would host sessions or plan trips elsewhere. Schools could then send their referrals so that interventions could be planned and implemented over the summer.

**“Schools have about two to three months to start sending in their referrals, and then in the summer term we send a coach into the schools to begin the intervention.” – LA-A**

In some cases, interventions run by LAs or schools were more focused versions of the support provided to all young people. In others, young people were provided with more specialised support tackling wider issues such as trauma, mental health or learning difficulties from external partners like charities or health organisations.

**“It’s trauma-informed support, neuro, linguistic programming, all sorts. You know that are never even dreamed of few years ago. But that’s the kind of support those young people are needing.” – Careers Hub-E**

#### **Example of Intervention 1: LA-E**

This LA delivers a mentoring programme for young people at risk of becoming NEET. Experienced social workers and careers advisors will meet with young people and their parents/carers where appropriate. Initially, they will work to understand any barriers that may be in place, such as health conditions, familial context or anything that may be getting in the way of a young person attending school, a key metric for this LA, or working towards their future. The mentor will create a collaborative approach with parents/carers to manage these barriers, before helping to make plans and submit applications for work or further education.

In other areas, there were specialist programmes funded to reach out to young people and talk to them about potential careers in certain sectors, like the health sector.

**“There is funding from Health and Care, so our local Integrated Commissioning Board, and they've funded a two-year intervention programme for the most disadvantaged children in the region to talk to them about careers in health and care.” – Careers Hub-A**

### **Example of Intervention 2: LA-A**

This LA received government funding to allow them to run a two-year intervention programme in the Health and Care sector. A local health organisation would meet with young people most at risk in the region to talk to them about careers in health and care. Young people were given a RAG rating as a result of their score from the RONI and those with the highest scores, who had indicated interest or openness to careers in health care would be considered for this programme.

The programme would begin with group sessions, followed by one-to-one conversations with young people who were interested in the sector, building up to extended work placements.

### **Example of Intervention 3: LA-C**

This LA works closely with Jobcentre Plus to provide workshops and training sessions for young people identified as being at risk of becoming NEET. These focus on soft skills like communication and teamwork, as well as job-seeking skills like CV writing and interview techniques. Young people also receive one-to-one support from the Jobcentre and careers coaches, where they start to have conversations about their next steps. These conversations cover general advice about pathways as well as specific advice pertaining to specific courses and required skillsets based on an individual's goals.

An important aspect of the interventions delivered by schools and other organisations was that they were tailored to the young person, i.e., considering their unique circumstances and needs. School staff said this was important so that young people felt engaged and listened to, rather than receiving a general service that was not designed for them.

**“It’s bespoke to that young person and their circumstances, you should be doing this and all those resources sit on that RONI tool.”**

**– Careers Hub-E**

### **Post-16 Transition Support**

Stakeholders in the scoping phase of the study identified the post-16 transition as a critical period for risk of young people becoming NEET. Colleges and in some cases voluntary and community sector organisations working with LAs offered transition services including:

- Sessions designed to help young people get ready for the move from school to further education or work.
- Supporting young people to organise work experience or shadowing family and/or friends in their place of work.<sup>25</sup>
- Arranging visits or short placements in a further education college so that young people could get used to the environment and see what it could offer them.
- Staff or advisors from LAs supporting young people with regular one-to-one check-ins as they settle into college. This highlights the importance of a whole-systems approach to supporting young people as they transition into education and employment.

**“If the link is to a certain college, the advisors are already in there and they will work with them over the summer and make sure they transition smoothly and they can continue working with them for a**

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that there are limitations associated with this approach as it can reinforce intergenerational disadvantage where families do not have as much access to strong employment networks.

**little bit longer while they're in the college until they're settled.” –  
Careers Hub-A**

All LAs recognised the importance of this transition period. However, respondents in some schools felt that transition support was insufficient and called for a more systematised approach, which they felt would support more positive outcomes for young people.

**“That's a big thing for me in terms of transition, particularly for some of our more vulnerable students. I want there to be a proper transition from school to college and have a bit more open dialogue and just make sure that those students who live here know what to expect, know that they're supported and feel that they're going to get what they need.” – School-C**

Some schools reported that they checked in with previous years' leavers to see how they were doing, offer support and encouragement, and, if needed, signpost them to further support. A list from the LA told schools where the young people ended up and which of those may still be at risk.

**“We try to keep in touch with them to see how the college is going, what are they doing, do they need any support maybe or you know, what's happening for them. Last year I've certainly picked up a few who have dropped out and have really fallen kind of through the net and they were just at home trying to apply for an apprenticeship, but nothing was happening. So, I've referred them on to services within the city.” – School-C**

## 7. Enablers and barriers to RONI use and effectiveness

The main factors influencing the use of RONI tools were relationships between stakeholders, resources and skills, and data sharing and quality. These factors also influenced the effectiveness of RONI tools.

### Relationships between stakeholders

Well established relationships and effective communication between LA and schools (and post-16 providers), which facilitated data sharing, effective targeting of support, and collecting data on outcomes, were identified as a significant enabler to the use of RONIs. Where engagement from schools was patchy, or schools' staff were not fully on board with the RONI agenda, LAs reported lower success with RONI implementation. In some LAs, staff reported lower engagement from academies.

**“It’s just been good communication. I think we just need to keep communicating really well with the schools, and I think that’s why it’s worked so well.” – LA-B**

**“One of our main challenges is actually the timeframe in which we get responses from the schools. Sometimes you know, schools can take a while, because as we know, schools are just extremely busy environments. So, it does take a lot of chasing up. A lot of follow-up emails. A lot of calling. Before we do get the information that we need sent over.” – LA-A**

Peer-to-peer learning between schools supported development. Schools highlighted using Careers Hub Network meetings to share good practice between school careers leaders around identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Collaboration with other services within the LA, such as the Education Welfare Officers or Youth Justice teams, facilitated data sharing and ease of referrals to other agencies.

**“We have really good relationships now with SEND, with social workers, with education, welfare, basically all the other people in the council who work with young people. So, we’re not relying on getting that information from schools because to be honest, schools, it’s patchy with the information that schools give us.” – LA-B**

### **Resources and skills**

Resources (funding and staff) were seen as a major factor impacting RONI use, both at LA and school level. Those LAs benefitting from external funding streams saw this as a key factor facilitating their RONI development. However, many LAs, including those with external funding, reported issues with patchy funding (and to a lesser extent, skills related to data integration and manipulation). In particular, the time-bound nature of some external funding was seen as a barrier to maintaining systems and retaining high-quality staff.

Funding issues could hinder continuity and LAs’ ability to make full use of the available data and refine their existing tools. LAs also reported requiring more capacity to help schools make full use of the available data.

**“I think maybe focus on the schools and just letting them know the amount of data that can be pulled from it, I don’t know how much the schools use it or how much they’re aware of it.” – LA Careers Team-C**

LAs also reported lacking the resources to use time-intensive intervention methods, such as door-knocking, to keep track of young people missing from the system, relying on attendance data and school follow-up.

There was variation in schools’ capacity to make full use of the available data. Some schools found it difficult knowing how to use the data effectively, owing to the quantity of data provided. Having more resources, such as a dedicated staff member within the LA, could help schools understand how to make full use of the available RONI data.

Similarly, school resources impacted their ability to provide high-quality careers support to young people identified as at risk. For example, in one LA, schools paid for every

referral to the LA Careers Advisors. The LA reported that this may prevent some schools from referring all young people in need of support. Schools commonly reported needing more resources to work with parents in a holistic, all-family approach. Careers Leads saw this as crucial for the effectiveness of any interventions put in place.

Some LAs felt that while RONIs can be effective in identifying risk, this does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes if the resources are not available to counteract this risk. A lack of resources was a barrier, in some cases, to offering personalised intervention. They said this may be because of funding affecting how much support could be given, or because of the quality of the support.

### **“The impact of the work that we've done, it's clearly had no impact because they're still in the same place as they were in Year 7.” – LA-G**

Young people from Youth Futures' Building Futures Youth Advisory Group were concerned that interventions were not being effectively identified. Students shared that while some schools had visible support systems like posters and counsellors, there were significant barriers to accessing help, including confidentiality concerns and a lack of trust in teachers. Consequently, students were not sharing information that would alert staff that they were at risk, and their lack of engagement in the process was a barrier. The young people felt that some students were unlikely to ask for help and therefore would be missed. Some young people did not want to be seen as getting extra attention or that they were struggling for fear of how it would appear to their peers.

### **“I feel like schools are so bad at identifying who needs help.” – Building Futures Youth Advisory Group**

#### **Data sharing and quality**

It was vital to have accurate and comprehensive data to support the RONI process. Respondents felt that this was enabled by robust data-sharing agreements and data coming from a wide range of sources. In general, respondents said that data sharing was improving in terms of its quality and timeliness.

The inclusion of quantitative data was enabled by robust data-sharing agreements with a range of relevant stakeholders, including children's social services and the NHS. Conversely, not having data sharing agreements in place, or delays to setting these up owing to the administrative burden, created barriers to the RONI process in some areas,

making it difficult to capture the full range of data required. For example, in one of the case study LAs, some schools struggled to find the time to complete the necessary forms because they were waiting for data to be shared by a partner. In another case study LA, limitations in staff resources, combined with the technical nature of the task, slowed down the process of setting up data-sharing agreements with additional stakeholders.

**“You come across all GDPR and stuff, not excuses, but reasons why they can't be as helpful as you'd like them to be.” – Careers Hub - E**

One LA commented that not having access to contextual data was a barrier to informing the RONI process.

**“We don't have the additional layers of that context of what's happened, what's gone on, who's done what, what worked, what didn't work. And that would be fantastic if we could go and actually get hold of that, because that would be the next level of what does the RONI actually do?” – LA-G**

Another barrier related to data access was the difficulty of keeping track of some young people. This could be young people who were home educated and therefore off the radar for schools or support organisations; members of a travelling community with no fixed abode; or students from abroad who return in the holidays.

**“[We are worried] about young people that are leaving the country, so a lot of our Eastern European young people often go back to Poland for the summer.” – LA-A**

Some LAs also highlighted a lack of existing data on certain risk factors, such as access to transport. One rural LA commented that barriers to accessing transport are a key risk factor; however, given their inability to identify which young people relied on public transport, they could not include it in the RONI tool.

Keeping the RONI under regular review and updating it as necessary was another enabler that supported RONI effectiveness. There were examples of where the introduction of new indicators through reviewing and adapting RONIs had allowed for young people who would have previously been missed to be identified.

A couple of LAs were able to utilise RONI data for young people at an earlier age and felt that this was an important factor in how successful RONIs can be, allowing them to identify risk earlier and have more time to work with young people. One LA highlighted the value of capturing data early to build a full picture of the young person's journey through education, even if the intervention was only delivered later.

**“We now share the RONI a lot earlier than we ever have done in the past. So we're now looking at those in Year 7, and are hoping to have that ability to track that journey right through education...” – LA-G**

Conversely, some LAs reported that not being able to track indicators over time was a barrier to effective practice. In some LAs, the RONI process started in Year 11, and there was a feeling that this was too late to adequately identify some young people and certainly too late to then enact suitable support plans.

Resource and capacity also acted as enablers – or barriers – to data sharing and quality. Respondents noted the importance of experienced practitioners who are able to identify subtle nuances, changes or patterns in young people's behaviour, helping to build a more comprehensive picture of NEET risk. On the other hand, some respondents identified issues with staff being short on time and not reporting in enough detail. Data quality could also be affected if it was being gathered from temporary staff or staff who did not have as strong a relationship with a young person, not knowing them well enough to capture more contextual data. In some cases, these data issues were rectified by asking for more detail, though this could create issues around timelines and additional work.

## 8. Conclusions

**This chapter draws together the key findings from the study and proposes further avenues for research and RONI development based on the findings and identified gaps.**

The research has highlighted considerable variation in how RONIs are implemented across LAs, shaped by differences in local context, LA resources, and the degree of autonomy afforded to schools. While some areas have adopted sophisticated, data-driven models, others rely more heavily on school-led identification and contextual assessment. Across all areas, stakeholders stressed the importance of professional judgement by school staff alongside quantitative indicators. In some areas, there was a trend of expanding the use of RONIs to earlier year groups, as early as Year 7. While this usually did not lead to earlier intervention, schools appreciated having data to enable a fuller picture of their pupils' education journeys.

The study found that RONIs were perceived as more effective where there was strong collaboration between LAs, schools, and other stakeholders to identify young people at risk and target support. Well-resourced LAs with established data-sharing agreements were able to refine their RONI tools and incorporate feedback from schools, leading to perceptions of improved accuracy. Early identification and partnership working were identified as key enablers, supporting timely and targeted support. In these areas, there was anecdotal evidence of improved outcomes and reduced NEET rates.

However, the findings also highlighted ongoing challenges in effectively using RONIs. Limited resources at both LA and school level restricted the ability to collect, analyse, and interpret data, deliver interventions, and monitor the effectiveness of support. Data-sharing difficulties, gaps in tracking hard-to-reach young people, and patchy engagement from some schools were common barriers. The research identified that there were gaps in longer-term outcome monitoring and LAs' ability to link these back to review the effectiveness of RONIs and related support interventions.

### **Priorities for development and future research**

The research suggests that while RONIs are playing an increasingly important role in helping LAs and schools to identify and support young people at risk of becoming NEET, there is a need for ongoing research, investment, and development. Based on the findings of this study, we have identified the following areas as priorities for future research and RONI development:

- **Impacts of early identification:** The present study has found that while some LAs are beginning to use RONIs with younger cohorts, interventions often remain focused on Year 10 and 11 pupils. Further work is needed to understand whether and when this expansion leads to earlier prevention efforts and improved outcomes for young people.
- **Models of transition support:** The summer transition period from school to further education or work was identified as a critical period in NEET prevention. The present research highlighted significant variability in the extent and quality of transition support provided by LAs and schools. Future research should further investigate the varied models of transition support (LA versus school-provided), how it is funded, and how the effectiveness of support during this period could be improved.
- **Long-term outcome tracking and monitoring of effectiveness:** This research has identified gaps in long-term outcome data as hindering schools' and LAs' ability to assess the effectiveness of their tools and interventions, voiced particularly by the LAs with more mature RONI systems. Further work is needed to develop robust mechanisms for long-term outcome tracking and embed rigorous monitoring practices within LA systems. This would enable a fuller evaluation of the effectiveness of RONI tools and interventions, helping refine risk indicators.
- **Data access, integration, and sharing processes:** The study has identified some challenges in the LAs with a less data-led approach, in accessing and linking up data from schools and other services. Further work could focus on gathering best practice and developing streamlined methods for data sharing and integrating diverse datasets, including live updates and inclusion of family-level data, such as access to transport in rural areas.
- **Peer-to-peer sharing and dissemination of good practice:** The research highlighted considerable variation in the level of sophistication and use of RONIs across LAs. Given this variation, establishing structured peer-to-peer networks and knowledge-sharing platforms could facilitate the dissemination of effective practices. This could include sharing insights on data integration, intervention strategies, and monitoring effectiveness.
- **Ensuring sufficient resources to address identified risks:** This study has found that while RONIs can be effective in identifying risk, variations in funding levels and the quality of support offered are key factors influencing the effectiveness of interventions. Making sufficient resources and high-quality support available would support more positive outcomes for young people identified as at risk of becoming NEET.

## Implications for policy and practice

It is clear that RONIs in themselves are a starting point rather than an endpoint, in a much wider system of identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET at 16 and targeting support. For that system to work well, the research has identified the importance of:

- System-wide support for RONI development and use, including better data-sharing between services. This could involve local/regional policymakers working with education and wider stakeholders like youth justice teams and SEND services to develop a more holistic approach. Strong leadership from within the LA, working with external support, has helped to build this in a couple of the case study LAs.
- More resources for LAs to better coordinate the development and uptake of RONIs, and link this up to follow-up support. In LAs which are covered by a MSA, there is a potential role for MSAs to spearhead a more integrated and joined-up approach.
- Dedicated funding/ resourcing for careers leads in schools – particularly those in areas where there are high NEET rates – to enable earlier and more effective use of RONI tools.
- Technical skills support to enable more local adaptation of RONI tools. In some of the case studies in this report, technical assistance from Careers Hubs had been instrumental in developing a more data-informed approach.
- In terms of support interventions, focusing on key periods like summer holidays, and in particular the summer holiday period at the end of Year 11, to target support for transition among young people identified as being at risk of becoming NEET. Ensuring that follow-up support extends into the first term in post-16 education or training is also important, to support those young people who may be at risk of dropping out, but could benefit from advice on different options that would retain them in education or training, such as transfer into a more suitable course instead.

# Case study A

## LA context and overview of stakeholders

This urban LA has a high 16-17 NEET rate<sup>26</sup> and a rudimentary approach to RONI. The area has high levels of inner-city deprivation, as well as smaller areas of coastal and rural poverty. To inform this case study, two members of the LA's NEET support team were interviewed, along with the Careers Lead at the LA's Careers and Enterprise Hub and three schools' careers leads.

## Use of RONI instruments

In this LA, there is no centralised RONI tool. Previously, the LA had developed a tool to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET. The tool used broad indicators such as eligibility for FSM, 'Looked After Child' (LAC) status and SEND needs. However, this tool did not effectively identify the young people at risk of becoming NEET. The LA found it produced too many false positives, though the reasons for discontinuing its use were not clear to the schools interviewed, who thought it may no longer be used for financial reasons. The LA now encourages all schools to use their own methods to identify the young people they feel are at risk.

**“[The LA] used to provide [us with a list of] the students [at risk of becoming NEET], they used to provide that whether, you know, it's financial or ... but they don't do it anymore. They've just turned and said to me at the last couple of times we'll let you identify them.” – School-A**

The schools interviewed typically RAG rate young people's risk of becoming NEET based on different indicators, including school attendance, SEND needs, eligibility for FSM and levels of engagement with careers education. Each school interviewed included a slightly different combination of indicators in their method and had differing views on their relative importance for determining risk of becoming NEET. The schools interviewed also highlighted the importance of the Careers Leaders' experience and contextual knowledge of the young people in identifying those at highest risk of becoming NEET.

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<sup>26</sup> The NEET rates were sourced from [DfE-published statistics for 2024](#) and were classified as follows: Low (<3%), Average-lower (3-4.5%), Average (4.5-6%), High (>6%).

The school representatives interviewed were using RONIs to identify risk of becoming NEET in young people from Year 7, although the LA interventions are targeted at Year 11 students. The schools prepare a list of up to 30 Year 11 pupils per school and pass this to the LA NEET support team. The limit of 30 young people per school was implemented by the LA due to the capacity limitations of the NEET support service. Along with sharing the outputs with the LA, schools also share these with local colleges to aid with transition support for young people.

## Development of RONI instruments

The absence of a single RONI tool across this area means there is a lack of systematic identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET between different schools. Despite the individual approaches taken, schools described how they reflect regularly on how their method of identifying those at risk of becoming NEET is working. All schools interviewed explained how they consider new research and evidence to inform how they identify young people at risk of becoming NEET. Schools were in favour of a more consistent approach to RONI tools across the LA, or at least some more substantial guidance on how schools should be going about the process.

The local Careers and Enterprise Hub also advocated for the development of a more systematic RONI tool across the LA. Distinct from the LA NEET support team, the Careers and Enterprise Hub established network meetings for schools' Careers Leads to facilitate the sharing of good practice, which schools value. The Careers and Enterprise Hub promotes the use of the Future Skills Questionnaire<sup>27</sup> tool to all schools in the LA to help schools identify young people with limited careers knowledge or characteristics such as poor resilience, which may indicate a risk of becoming NEET. The Careers and Enterprise Hub had found schools open to this. One school interviewed had adopted this suggestion and was incorporating this data into their RONI.

## Effectiveness of RONI instruments

The LA has a tracking system for the young people identified by schools as at risk of becoming NEET, which is used to monitor how effectively schools are identifying those at risk. However, schools were not aware of this and instead used their own methods to review the effectiveness of their RONI methods. This includes comparing their records with destination data provided by colleges. Schools and the local Careers and Enterprise Hub independently collect destination data directly from colleges, as they found the data sharing on this from the LA was not as timely as they would like.

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<sup>27</sup> [Future Skills Questionnaire | CEC Resource Directory](#)

Schools feel their RONI tools are effective, as the same young people they identified at risk of becoming NEET were later found to be NEET.

One limitation in the effectiveness of the RONI tools used by schools was for young people from the travelling community. For these young people, schools said that it could be difficult to obtain historic information about school attendance and later destination information to monitor whether they became NEET.

## Interventions

The LA does not play a role in coordinating or supporting schools to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET, but does offer support to the young people that the schools identify.

The recently introduced LA NEET support service offers one-to-one careers advice to the young people identified as at risk of becoming NEET by schools. This service helps young people with applications for college or apprenticeships and signposts them to agencies that could help address barriers (e.g. mental health or SEND needs). The service taps into its network across the LA to provide referrals to appropriate services for the young people at risk of becoming NEET. The LA NEET support service would like to offer more support to young people than they currently do, but is limited by funding and staff capacity. The support from the LA is available from February of Year 11. However, schools felt that the intervention offered by the LA at this stage was too late to be effective at preventing NEET. The LA intends to monitor the take up and effectiveness of the support they offer once the support is more established.

The local Careers and Enterprise Hub offers a range of programmes to raise aspirations with young people. These include specific work with young people in Alternative Provision, advice on appropriate career options, a careers fair, an intervention programme for disadvantaged young people getting into careers in health and help for schools to make connections to employers for those at risk of becoming NEET.

Schools also described offering a range of interventions to those at risk of becoming NEET. One school continues to offer careers support for 3 years after the young person has left school. Forms of support offered by schools include assisting young people to enrol in college or training, taking them to interviews, and incorporating specific employability lessons into the timetable. One school offers mentoring programmes, including one specifically targeted at boys from disadvantaged backgrounds who are typically at risk of becoming NEET. Schools were offering this support to young people throughout Years 7 to 11.

## Enablers and barriers

### Enablers:

- The LA's NEET support team felt that having a strong network within the LA means they can effectively refer young people at risk of becoming NEET to services that can support them.
- Schools highlight the Careers and Enterprise Hub Network meetings as a key enabler. They use the meetings to share good practice between school careers leaders around identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET.

### Barriers:

- The LA's limited capacity and funding available to support schools is seen as a key barrier to effectively identifying and supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET.
- Limited data sharing from the LA is a barrier to effective RONI tools, according to schools, along with a lack of guidance on how to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET. This has led to inconsistent approaches between schools.
- Data protection regulations mean that schools cannot gather all the information they would like to help them accurately identify those at risk of becoming NEET, such as data from social care and health services.
- Schools also flagged low parental support and engagement as a barrier to effective interventions. The effectiveness of the intervention initiatives, while targeting the right young people, was reported to have limited success if the young person's parents were not on board.

# Case study B

## LA context and overview of stakeholders

This LA is urban with an average-to-low 16-17 NEET rate.<sup>28</sup> School exclusion rates are among the highest in the country. Levels of deprivation vary between wards, with some areas having high rates of deprivation. There is a sizeable travelling community and many families that are transient. There are also high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.

The LA works with a delivery partner to identify and support its young people who are at risk of becoming NEET. The partner also works with the local county council, and in some instances, work is triangulated between the City and County LAs and the partner in the case of young people moving between areas or living in one and attending school in another.

This case study was informed by interviews with a project manager from the LA and a Vice Principal of a school, as well as a group discussion with staff from the delivery partner.

## Use of RONI instruments

The LA uses a cloud-based system to share relevant data. This includes a careers database (information on work experience, aspirations, etc.), refugee status, experience of being in care, education or welfare plans, any interactions with the youth justice service, and any social care protection plans. This is then shared with the delivery partner, who uses it to develop a RAG rating.

A career advisor is based in all schools, and they form a close relationship with the delivery partner to identify and implement interventions. There are slightly different models for the city and county council. For the city council, all young people are assessed for risk of NEET. The delivery partner starts to work with those identified as at risk of NEET at the start of Year 11 (typically in October of that year). The county council does not have the same contract, but instead, schools can 'buy' support from the delivery partner directly. This tends to happen from April in Year 11.

Once a young person is given a RAG rating, the delivery partner prioritises those most at risk and starts to develop plans to support them. A careers advisor in the school aims to

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<sup>28</sup> The NEET rates were sourced from [DfE-published statistics for 2024](#) and were classified as follows: Low (<3%), Average-lower (3-4.5%), Average (4.5-6%), High (>6%).

see those young people at least three times over the course of the year. This includes a guidance interview (to identify the types of support that would be most beneficial), support with applications for college, and college visits. The intervention is carried out throughout Year 11, including the summer holidays, to ensure that the young people are enrolled into college or have a secured training placement come September. In some cases, support continues after school with a live register showing those without a post-school destination who are still in need of or receiving support. This is not a common occurrence and would happen as long as the young person required support, typically for no more than three months.

### **Development of RONI instruments**

The indicators have been developed over time based on experience and monitoring young people across the LA. For example, a recent increase in the number of refugees in the area has led to refugee status being included as a NEET indicator. These indicators are used and monitored throughout Year 11, but additional work is done around GCSE results time to see who needs support based on the grades that they have achieved.

**“I think there is a real localised context. So, if you took the city for an example, you would see a far higher number of refugee families and unaccompanied asylum seeker young people. In other areas you would definitely see more young people who are first time entrants into the youth justice service.” – LA-B**

There are data sharing agreements embedded within both the city and county contracts, which have been designed to share any data pertinent to the RONI across the school, LA, social services and youth justice system. These were driven by a delivery partner using their experience to inform other stakeholders of what an effective data-sharing agreement would look like. A key aspect of this is monitoring electively home educated young people to make sure they are not missed.

### **Effectiveness of RONI instruments**

The delivery partner has regular meetings with the LAs to review how the RONI has worked and identify any gaps or areas for improvement.

While research participants believed that their RONI process is generally effective, they also said that challenges around funding are impairing its effectiveness. The list of factors used as risk of NEET indicators has shrunk due to a lack of funding to allow for access and management of data, with roles removed or reduced, meaning there are no longer

staff to manage the data. The LA budget available to support young people at risk of NEET is limited, and the LA said they could not support all those identified as at high risk and had to prioritise those with very high risk based on their data.

One example of an indicator that has been removed from the RONI is having SEND, due to the high numbers of SEND in the LA, although having an EHCP remains an indicator. However, the LA still finds that many children with SEND do not have an EHCP, and this is contributing to their risk of becoming NEET. Removing SEND from the tool poses a risk of these young people slipping through the net.

Staff from the LA felt that RONIs could be more effective if started with children when they were younger, feeling it would better help them to identify risks.

**“[Starting in Year 9] you would already be picking up on that young person and have a long and really robust relationship. You would know a lot of the things that were happening. You would be able to pick up on things that might not be in a RONI list, but actually were going to disproportionately affect a young person and identify that they might need support.” LA-B**

The delivery partner and LAs plan to move to a new management information tool, which will allow them to analyse data more extensively. They will be able to look at which indicators are more prevalent in certain areas, allowing them to effectively target and tailor resources.

## **Interventions**

The delivery partner takes an individual approach when working with young people. In an initial meeting, they will take time to assess the young person's needs and look to build a relationship with them. Support will then be tailored with different professionals brought in to assist as needed. These may be social workers or youth justice workers, or other professional agencies, to get a complete understanding of the young person and how best they can be supported throughout their interventions.

**“We take a very person-centred approach to any young person that we work with. So, we would be assessing young people's needs. We would be looking to build a relationship with them.”  
Delivery Partner, LA-B**

There is also a drop-in service where young people can be allocated a career advisor, and a website dedicated to offering support outside of career advisor meetings. Young people are also signposted to sources of funding and help with transport. The career workers at the delivery partner are all trained in a variety of guidance processes and tools to offer advice and also practical help, like assistance with applications or attending enrolment days.

The partner also offers support to young people who have become NEET. Social media has been a useful tool to engage with these young people and connect them with opportunities and areas of support. These could be X or Instagram posts advertising events or services, or groups that young people can join to ask questions and be part of an online community.

## Enablers and barriers

### Enablers:

- The main enabler has been successful working relationships between organisations. Having dedicated careers advisors who work with different organisations to pool data and experience allows stakeholders to develop a detailed understanding of a young person's situation. Interviewees said that this collaborative approach and having shared values have been very effective.
- Good data sharing is a key enabler to effectively monitoring the risk of young people becoming NEET. The statutory guidance on data sharing has changed this year, and the data sharing policy makes tracking and supporting young people easy and effective. Changes have made it easier for organisations to share data and quicker to get authorisation, helping the whole process to be more efficient.

### Barriers:

- Young people moving frequently, making them hard to track. There are large traveller communities in some wards.

# Case study C

## LA context and overview of stakeholders

In this urban LA with an average 16-17 NEET rate,<sup>29</sup> the RONI and NEET prevention agenda sits with two LA teams: the Careers Team and the Supporting Families Team, which works with schools to support vulnerable young people. To inform this case study, both team leaders were interviewed, alongside two school Careers Leaders.

## Use of RONI instruments

The RONI classification in this LA ascribes each young person a risk score on a scale of 0-3. The score is generated in the LA's information system, drawing on automatically collected data from the education, social services, youth justice, and health systems. Indicators used include social care involvement, youth justice involvement, exploitation risk factors, FSM eligibility, attendance, EHCP status, and SEND status. The LA information system updates daily, enabling the Supporting Families Team to continuously track vulnerability.

**“We've developed a hub ... [which] pulls data from multiple sets, so across children, social care, education, for example, ... into one system to create what we call a golden record for a child. So, what that does is it will update with live data and vulnerability.” – LA Supporting Families Team-C**

The LA Careers Team launches the RONI assessment every January. The tool consists of an Excel spreadsheet of those young people identified as at risk, i.e., those categorised with a RONI score of 2 or 3. The spreadsheet is shared with the schools, and the LA asks them to amend the RONI list based on their contextual knowledge of young people. To this end, school Careers Leads reported looking particularly at attendance, attainment, SEND, EAL, and any pastoral considerations in reassessing young people's risk of becoming NEET. The other Careers Lead reported changing young people's risk scores into internal RAG ratings, but not reporting this back to the LA. This school also included a 'grey' category for young people with sustained non-attendance or those accessing alternative provision. Regarding the use of data within school teams, one Careers Lead

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shares the RONI list within the Careers, Attendance, and Safeguarding Teams but not with tutors and teachers to avoid creating preconceptions of young people. The schools interviewed particularly appreciate that the tool aggregates data into one easily accessible spreadsheet. They review and amend the yearly risk of NEET list on an ongoing basis as young people's circumstances change.

The LA respondents view the RONI as a helpful tool for opening conversations with schools about which young people may require support.

**“We use that RONI data in a kind of exploratory way to help the schools make sure they are identifying the right young people and putting forward for support the ones who are going to need it the most. But as I say, we do get them to consider those wider pupils as well because they know their students best. They're in school five days a week with them, hopefully. And they'll have a clearer idea of their progression options.” – LA Careers Team-C**

The LA uses the RONI with most schools. The LA Careers Team Leader reported using it with all mainstream schools in the area except four, who opted to commission a different careers provision. The Supporting Families Team works with all mainstream schools, using the RONI tool alongside other trackers of vulnerability.

The LA uses the RONI with Year 10 and Year 11 pupils, but in one alternative provision, coverage was expanded to include Year 9 pupils in their final term to enable early identification and support. The interviewed schools use the RONI in Year 10 for school awareness of risk and in Year 11 to target interventions.

### **Development of RONI instruments**

One year ago, the LA coordinated a RONI adjustment exercise to increase accuracy and make fuller use of available data. This process involved the Careers Team, Supporting Families Team and the LA Information Analyst and incorporated feedback collected through conversations and meetings with school staff, Supporting Families Link Coordinators, and LA Careers Advisors.

This process resulted in the following indicator adjustments: lowering the weighting of FSM eligibility (due to high FSM rates in the area), adding exploitation risk factors, lowering the weighting of an EHCP, increasing the overall weight of low attendance,

and differentiating the weighting of low attendance by banded rates. Both the LA and school respondents reported low attendance as the most important risk factor.

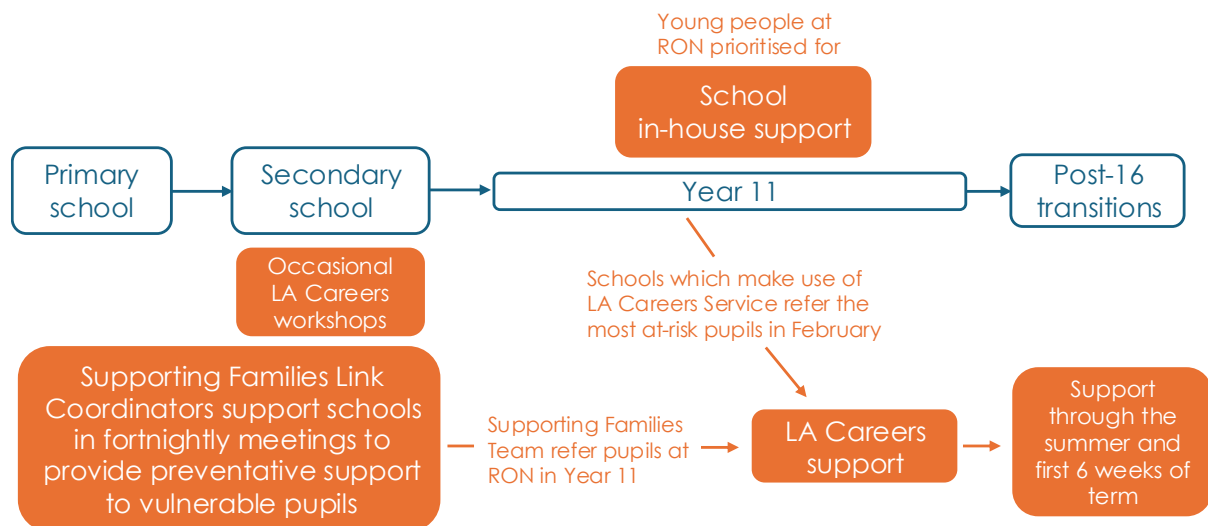
### Effectiveness of RONI instruments

The LA respondents thought that the RONI tool captured risk accurately, especially following the recent adaptations, though the Careers Team Leader found that the RONI often missed the 'invisible middle', i.e. young people who did not meet the RONI markers but still required support. Schools consider the tool reasonably effective but highlighted that it does not provide much detail on young people's circumstances. All respondents noted the school's contextual knowledge of young people was needed to achieve the required nuance.

One school Careers Lead mentioned a rising situation of young people entering employment directly without any training. This group is not identified by the RONI process as they are not becoming NEET, but the school has recently created an action plan to support these young people into training.

### Interventions

The chart below shows the interventions delivered by schools and the LA.



Schools that make use of the services of the LA Careers Team refer the most at-risk young people in February for more intense support, entailing careers guidance, sometimes combined with further interventions, such as mental health support, job application support, CV writing, and help and support with travel to college, for example, to apply for a bus pass.

Supporting Families Education Link Coordinators meet fortnightly with school staff, mainly with Safeguarding Leads, to discuss young people identified as at risk of becoming NEET or otherwise vulnerable, with the aim of setting up a prevention plan. They ensure schools refer young people at risk of becoming NEET in Year 11 to the LA Careers Team. To support data continuity, the Supporting Families Team create a transition record for these young people in the LA's information system.

In terms of school in-house careers support, one school reported prioritising the most at-risk young people for one-to-one meetings. Beyond individual sessions, schools deliver group skills and post-16 options sessions, based on young people's needs.

Post-16 transition support is provided mainly by the LA Careers Team. Schools reported that those young people who received LA support during term time were supported by a named LA contact through the summer holidays and the first six weeks of term. The schools interviewed offer limited transition support to pupils not in receipt of LA support, though one school conducts September telephone check-ins with their leavers, referring those who have dropped out to LA services.

To monitor outcomes, schools receive data on leavers who do not appear on the roll at any post-16 provider in September. In November, this is followed by full 'sustained destination' data: an overview of the support received by leavers and their outcomes. As schools only receive destinations data beyond this point with a 2-year delay, they have endeavoured to set up their own monitoring processes. For example, one school reported requesting second-year enrolment data directly from one of the local colleges.

## Enablers and barriers

### Enablers:

- Strong relationships and collaboration between the LA and schools serve as the key enabler to the effective use of RONIs. The schools view the Careers Team as supportive and responsive to queries about the data, and the Supporting Families Team collaborate closely with school staff to support early identification and intervention.

### Barriers:

- Schools not accessing live RONI data present a barrier to more effective use of the data, as does limited awareness and understanding of the RONI among some school staff. The LA thought that a dedicated LA staff member to help schools understand how RONI could be used more extensively would help.

- The Careers Team Leader speculated that their service being provided for a fee per referral may prevent some schools from referring all those in need of this support, though neither of the school respondents confirmed this.

# Case study D

## LA context and overview of stakeholders

This mostly urban LA contains many deprived areas. Historically, this LA had high levels of NEET, and currently it has an average 16-17 NEET rate.<sup>30</sup> The LA has a proactive approach to identifying risk, and though this can vary in different areas, the LA is soon to adopt a new system that will allow real-time data sharing between stakeholders to help improve efficiencies in identifying and mitigating risk.

There was a peak in NEET rates following the COVID-19 pandemic, and the decline of certain industries in the area has hit the local economy and greatly affected the local job market. Despite this, career leads in schools reported higher proportions of young people achieving positive outcomes after leaving school. School staff interviewed at least partly attributed this to the use of NEET indicators, although the direct causation cannot be proved.

This case study was informed by interviews with two school career leads and a team leader in the LA Education Service and the Head of Post 16 Progression and Careers.

## Use of RONI instruments

The LA uses RONIs but refers to them as RASIs (Requiring Additional Support Indicator), preferring the softer language. The LA have found the use of softer language like this has had a positive effect on attitudes towards wider work around NEET with LAs, school staff and pupils.

The RASIs are used to identify any young person who might need additional support in the transitional phase between the end of GCSEs and moving into work or further education. The duration of this support typically lasts between a week and two months.

The LA inputs data to a spreadsheet that determines an overall risk score, based on measures such as whether the young person has an EHCP plan, whether the LA report the involvement of social workers, and their academic attainment and attendance. Schools independently do the same with the data that they hold, and the careers lead makes a comparison between the two reports to see if there is a match in the young people identified as at risk. Sometimes there are differences in scores between the LA and the school. This can often be because of observations from the school or social

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<sup>30</sup> The NEET rates were sourced from [DfE-published statistics for 2024](#) and were classified as follows: Low (<3%), Average-lower (3-4.5%), Average (4.5-6%), High (>6%).

workers about behaviour in school, or difficulties at home that do not feature in the data shared between stakeholders (such as behavioural data). When there is no match between the LA's and the school's scores, the case and evidence is jointly reviewed. If a risk is identified as a result of the review, the young person gets flagged for support.

A monthly meeting between schools, LAs and other stakeholders, such as members of the SEND team or charities that provide interventions, is held to discuss those who were flagged because of their RASI score, to plan and review support required. The relevant organisations regularly review data sharing agreements and also share information with post-16 providers as part of the transition process.

### **Development of RONI instruments**

Around five years ago, the LA researched RONI models that were being used nationally. They identified the model being used in one LA as effective in terms of the outcomes it was achieving and its functionality, but, as mentioned above, felt that they wanted to change the name.

**“The reason why we call it a RASI is just for that strengths-based language really...they didn't want their teams ignoring those young people that might need... [support] through the mental health and well-being, so we call it a requiring additional support indicator so it's a RASI.” LA-D**

The LA reviews the model every year to make sure it reflects the current young population. These reviews have led to additional indicators being included in the RASI template; one recent example is incorporating information about any recent bereavements. The LA found that this can have a real impact on post-school transitions, something that they identified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The LA also makes sure that they consider any changes in contextual data. For example, there was a high proportion of SEND in some areas, and this was strongly linked to those at risk of NEET. All indicators are considered, such as suspensions, exclusions, and low attendance, but awareness of SEND and its implications is highlighted as a key point of discussion.

## Effectiveness of RONI instruments

The LA is starting to see the impact of the work they have been doing. The current risk-identification process has been in place for the past five years, and the number of positive outcomes, such as a young person completing the first year of a college course, is now increasing.

Through the use of RASIs and the ongoing monitoring of those identified as at risk, the LA is also able to identify when young people have dropped out of education and training. Many were taking up places on further education courses, but it was either a course they were not interested in, or they found the transition difficult and ended up dropping out.

**“Sometimes they’ve been put into a course that they don’t really particularly want to do, or they’ve gone to an environment because their friends are going there but it’s not for them. They can very quickly ... be put into something else that’s better.” LA-D**

The LA highlighted the importance of offering tailored support throughout the post-16 transition period, but also of making sure that young people are on a path they want to take. The LA reported working with one college that had introduced trauma-informed practice, offering more flexible provision and creating calmer and more supportive learning environments.

Schools spoke of the effectiveness of the RASI and that one of its best qualities was the depth and breadth of information included, allowing them to have a detailed understanding of a young person’s situation and needs.

The LA reported one challenge is a high proportion of electively home-educated young people, which has historically made them harder to identify if they required support because the process was driven through schools. Through the use of RASIs, led by the LA, there are now teams that can pick up and address this need for additional support. The introduction of RASIs has led to better data sharing and joined up processes between stakeholders. This makes the process more effective and reduces the risk of a young person being missed. In this case, those without a school record could still be reached via social workers or charities.

## Interventions

The LA considers flexibility to be the key to successful interventions and takes time to ensure that the support offered to a young person is tailored and appropriate. This means interventions can range from career advice to workshops, health support or even counselling. The LA has seen an increase in young people struggling with their mental health, so more work is being done to signpost people to pupil referral units or specialist social, emotional and mental health provision.

The LA also funds a flexible programme with a college that gradually increases a young person's programme of study. This is designed to help those identified as at risk of NEET who might struggle with the transition. After starting with a youth worker who works for the delivery partner, where they can be coached in small or one-to-one environments, the young person can transition into studying and integrate into a college environment gradually.

## Enablers and barriers

### Enablers:

- Good preparation is an effective enabler in the process of identifying risk. Knowing contextual information, e.g. rates of SEND, allowed the LA to target their approach.
- The support that the LA offers is specifically targeted to individuals, which is necessary to make the most of their funding; for example, allocating one-to-one sessions to those who won't benefit from work in groups, or arranging trips for those who will benefit from the experience. However, this does mean that they can only work with those who have been identified rather than have a universal offer.

### Barriers:

- Slow data-sharing processes have been a barrier. For example, some schools struggle to find the time to complete the necessary forms because they are waiting for the necessary data to be shared by a partner. The move to a new data sharing system is expected to help address this issue and enable easier and quicker data sharing.
- Currently, there is no capacity to observe trends by area, but if this can be achieved, the LA is confident it will help them make plans bespoke to certain boroughs and be mindful of wards that are at greater risk and need more attention and specific types of support.

# Case study E

## LA context and overview of stakeholders

This intermediate rural LA with an average-lower 16-17 NEET rate<sup>31</sup> is very engaged in NEET risk identification, support and prevention. A number of actors at the LA level are involved in identifying and supporting young people with a high risk of becoming NEET. Challenges around NEET rates for this area include no local universities and a lack of transport links in some rural areas, making travel to a further education provider a significant time and financial commitment for some young people.

To inform this study, the leader of the team that developed the RONI tool was interviewed, along with the leader of the LA Careers Hub and the former head of another LA service that worked with young people at risk of becoming NEET. A school's careers lead was also interviewed.

## Use of RONI instruments

The use of the RONI is widespread in this LA. A new RONI tool has recently been developed by data scientists based on outcomes for past cohorts of young people. The LA operates a centralised point of data collection, which includes data from youth justice, the NHS, children's and adult social care, schools, and the Department for Work and Pensions. This system enables automated calculation of a holistic RONI that also considers the young person's family. RONI outputs are shared with a wide range of stakeholders, including schools, the Careers Hub, and other LA services. The output for each young person includes a risk rating for a list of vulnerabilities as well as suggested preventative interventions tailored to that young person's particular combination of risk factors. The RONI is currently being used with young people in Years 7 to 11, but it is gradually being extended to include young people in primary school from Year 6 to support early prevention. The LA is undertaking a programme of training to support extensive use of the RONI within schools.

Schools are encouraged to compare the outputs from the RONI tool with their own knowledge of their young people. Schools described the output they receive as really useful and appreciate that level of risk is identified and updated from the start of young people's secondary education.

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<sup>31</sup> The NEET rates were sourced from [DfE-published statistics for 2024](#) and were classified as follows: Low (<3%), Average-lower (3-4.5%), Average (4.5-6%), High (>6%).

**“The [RONI tool] itself is... it's really good, it does help and especially when we're looking at following the family up through Year 7 to 8 to 9.” – School-E**

### **Development of RONI instruments**

The LA secured external funding to develop its RONI tool. They hired a data scientist to look at predictive analytics and targeted risk models for the development of their RONI tool. This included reviewing past cohorts of young people who were and were not NEET and the vulnerabilities they had in common. The model was then trained to identify which risk factors were present for individuals later found to be NEET, and this was applied to the current population of young people in Years 7-11.

The LA is aware that the model cannot capture softer data, such as awareness of young people's aspirations and the support they may have in place in school. They highlighted the importance of the knowledge of school staff who know the young people and noted that this contextual knowledge from schools is integrated into RONI output.

**“What we say when we do any training on this model is, it's only there as a guide. It doesn't replace your professional knowledge of that child or individual on the ground.” – LA-E**

The development of the RONI is ongoing, with the expectation that it will become increasingly accurate over time as additional cohorts of young people are fed into the model. The RONI has also been tweaked based on school feedback.

### **Effectiveness of RONI instruments**

Because the introduction of the RONI is still at an early stage, its long-term effectiveness has not yet been fully tested. The LA is confident that the tool is effective and will continue to become more effective over time. The overall effectiveness of the RONI tool will be monitored using data prepared by the local Careers Hub on transitions to post-16 education and training.

The Careers Hub Lead had heard from schools that they are finding the output from the RONI tool matches closely with the young people they had identified as at risk of becoming NEET, indicating its effectiveness. However, schools did raise that the outputs do not always match perfectly with their own assessment of risk of becoming NEET. This is usually because the data-driven approach does not account for some of the softer

data that schools have, as they have a more holistic view of the individual young person.

## Interventions

Interventions available to support young people at risk of becoming NEET in this LA are wide-ranging, including mental health support, mentoring programmes designed specifically to support young people into education, employment or training, alongside more conventional forms of support such as trips to colleges. The RONI itself also suggests a bespoke combination of potential interventions for individual young people based on their specific risk factors. These resources have been developed with academics and are grounded in research on NEET prevention techniques.

One key support service for young people at risk of becoming NEET in the LA, which offered support with applications and interviews for further education, recently closed due to a lack of funding. The Careers Hub Lead and the former head of this service were both concerned about the impact that the closure of this service might have on the availability of appropriate interventions for young people at risk of becoming NEET.

## Enablers and barriers

### Enablers:

- The key enabler to the effective use of the RONI is accurate information being shared efficiently throughout the LA, from the services that feed into the RONI to the sharing of the outputs with schools and other services.
- The LA and Careers Hub Lead felt that using the RONI with younger people enabled it to be more effective for preventing NEET. Not waiting until Year 11 to identify those at risk of becoming NEET and provide appropriate support meant there were additional opportunities and time for the support to be effective at preventing NEET.

### Barriers:

- The Careers Hub Lead and the former head of another LA service that worked with young people at risk of becoming NEET raised concerns about how resource and funding capacity limitations affect the delivery of interventions once young people have been identified as at risk of becoming NEET. This limits the effectiveness of the RONI tool since it is perceived that there is little value in identifying those at risk of becoming NEET if they cannot then have appropriate preventative support put in place.

- In some instances, the LA felt that limited awareness of the new RONI tool was a barrier to its widespread effective use. Consequently, the LA team had introduced training available to schools in the use of the RONI tool.

# Case study F

## LA context and overview of stakeholders

In this urban LA with an average 16-17 NEET rate,<sup>32</sup> the NEET prevention agenda sits with two teams: 1) The LA's Careers team, which previously used to be an external charity but had recently been brought under the council. This comprises one youth engagement worker and a team of careers advisors working with referred pupils in Year 8 and above in all secondary schools, and 2) the re-engagement team, which is in charge of providing re-engagement activities as well as careers and transition support for at-risk young people in Year 11. To inform this case study, we interviewed the operational manager of the LA's Careers team, the manager of the re-engagement team and one school careers lead.

## Use of RONI tools

In this LA, identification of risk and resulting referrals to careers and re-engagement services are based on collaborative conversations between the LA and school staff. The LA holds yearly meetings with school Heads of Year, from Year 8 upwards, to discuss risks within their cohorts. These discussions are informed by a RONI, which is a list of risk categories, such as having an EHCP or involvement with youth justice. The finalised list of young people considered at risk of NEET is informed by school staff's knowledge of each young person's contextual circumstances.

Following the yearly meeting with Heads of Year, the LA Careers team implements a tier system, which includes three risk categories. The lowest risk category is 'minimum intervention', where the young person identified is progressing well and does not require extensive support; the middle tier is 'support', where a slightly higher level of support and monitoring is required; and the highest risk tier is 'intensive support', where support needs to be continuous and regular.

The interviewed school has developed its own internal RONI processes. It uses a portal system to upload data from their management system to this portal and allocate a RONI score based on this. This is where prioritisation of specific young people begins. The use of this data typically begins in Year 7 and continues throughout the school years. This is to identify those at risk of NEET and start intervention as early as possible.

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<sup>32</sup> The NEET rates were sourced from [DfE-published statistics for 2024](#) and were classified as follows: Low (<3%), Average-lower (3-4.5%), Average (4.5-6%), High (>6%).

**“So, I use that as a starting point and just upload data and then it works it out. It’s got the formulas and stuff and [it] will give me a RONI score at the end. Then I would prioritise those with a higher score for extra support, or share within teams that are skilled to go ‘look, these are on my risk of NEET radar’. And we’ll work together.” – School-F**

The school respondent reported calculating the RONI at select points in the school year. In Years 7 and 8, the data is updated once in each academic year. In Years 9 and 10, this increases to being updated twice in each academic year, and it is not until the young person reaches Year 11 that an update and download of the data occurs termly.

### **Development of RONI tools**

There are a number of different indicators used to determine a young person’s risk category. Indicators which would flag a higher risk category within the LA include having an EHCP or being involved with youth justice. Medium risk categories tend to be flagged for those who require SEN support, are young carers, or are in need of child protection.

**“What I would always say to school...what do you know about these young people basically, who are you really concerned about? Who do you think, fast forward a few years, they’re going to be on our NEET lists? You know, who are you concerned about behaviour, mental health, self-esteem, things like that that we need to know about.” – LA-F**

Indicators reported and used by the school interviewed include attendance, youth justice history, pregnancy, being a young carer, receiving free school meals, SEND and EAL status. These indicators all form part of the data downloaded from the schools’ own database and used to produce a RONI score. This score is graded on a scale from 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest score a young person can receive.

## Effectiveness of RONI tools

The LA helps schools assess the effectiveness of their RONI process by tracking the outcomes of the young people identified through destinations data. This data is compiled into a destination report by the LA and sent to the schools' Senior Leadership Team, Governors and Trustees. The school representative reported working with the LA to use their destinations report to understand the effectiveness of their identification and intervention practices.

**“The ultimate test of any work you do to reduce the risk of NEET is on your destination data.” – School-F**

The school Careers Lead reported that the RONI tool used typically tends to validate and confirm the names of young people they are already aware of being at risk of becoming NEET. They felt that this highlights that the tool is somewhat effective and is currently working well as a starting point to signpost young people for interventions. However, they said that this tool is only providing a depiction of one moment in time so it cannot always act as an accurate and reliable tool for identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET. This is where the importance of regularly updating the data comes in.

## Interventions

The LA reported having a team of careers advisors working with every school within this LA. On top of this support, if young people are identified as at risk of becoming NEET in Year 11, they are referred for more intensive support from the council's externally funded re-engagement service, in charge of re-engagement as well as careers and transition support.

Within the school interviewed, young people requiring interventions are identified based on the RONI score they receive. A bi-weekly meeting is held between the careers lead, deputy head and pastoral team to discuss the RONI report. The names of young people requiring support are typically already known beforehand; this meeting is used to check on what is being done, such as what the attendance officer is doing and what behavioural support is being offered to the young people.

In addition to this RONI tool, there is another spreadsheet used by the school to track and monitor the young people identified as being at risk of becoming NEET. This monitoring includes the academic progress of the young person alongside whether their circumstances change in order to be able to act accordingly, with enough time to

provide intervention. The school uses the spreadsheet to track and determine who is responsible for each young person's support and intervention. Determining who is responsible for individual young people happens at staff team meetings based on what indicators make up the majority of their RONI score – for example, respondents reported that if a young person is facing issues with their attendance, it will be the attendance officer's responsibility to provide them with support and intervention. However, this was described as “quite ad hoc and quite bespoke to that student”.

## Enablers and barriers

### Enablers:

- A key enabler in this area is the availability of both time and resources. The Careers Lead in this LA has a low volume of young people they need to provide extra support for, which makes keeping track of these young people and providing what they require easier.
- Regularly updating the data used as part of the RONI tool means that the school can obtain the most accurate and up-to-date depiction of a young person's situation. This enables support and intervention to be provided promptly when there is consistent monitoring.

### Barriers:

- The school respondent commented that the majority of employers in the LA are small self-employed companies. This makes looking for work experience opportunities or employer engagement with the schools' careers education challenging, as there are limited options of large employers in a position to offer this.

# Case study G

## LA context and overview of stakeholders

This LA is intermediate urban, with rural pockets where young people experience issues with access to transport to school, further education, and work. It has an average-lower 16-17 NEET rate.<sup>33</sup> The NEET prevention agenda sits with the LA Education Engagement Team and the local Careers Hub. To inform this case study, leads of both teams were interviewed, alongside three school Careers Leaders and one Further Education College Student Services Manager.

## Use of RONI instruments

The RONI in this LA is a RAG-rated Excel report of young people. The LA sources RONI input data from schools and social care services. It is important to note, however, that the school Careers Leaders we spoke with were not aware that the school shared this data with the LA, likely because this was in the remit of a different member of staff.

Following data aggregation and additional weighting of some indicators, such as attendance, the LA shares the Excel spreadsheet with the RONI ratings of young people of all year groups, around April every year, with all secondary schools. They recently expanded sharing this data to middle schools as well for earlier identification. The Education Engagement Team Leader reported middle school engagement with the tool to be lower, as it takes time to embed the RONI practice.

The LA also offers schools ad hoc support in interpreting the RONI reports. There is variation in how and with whom the output data is shared within school settings. One Careers Leader said they create a PowerPoint of young people at risk of becoming NEET in each year group, which they share with the relevant Head of Year and tutors, while another does not share RONI data beyond the Careers and Senior Leadership Teams to avoid overloading staff with information and creating preconceptions of young people. However, this Careers Leader reported ongoing discussions about widening the list of RONI data recipients to support the work of other specialist teams, such as the Attendance and Welfare teams. The College uses the RONI to track post-College destinations, but not incoming cohorts, as support for the latter is provided by pastoral staff without access to RONI data.

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<sup>33</sup> The NEET rates were sourced from [DfE-published statistics for 2024](#) and were classified as follows: Low (<3%), Average-lower (3-4.5%), Average (4.5-6%), High (>6%).

## Development of RONI instruments

The RONI was originally transposed from a similar LA's tool 15 years ago, which they found to be effective. The tool was adapted to the local context. The original RONI indicators were based on demographic and educational data, namely, looked-after status, FSM eligibility, attendance rates, exclusions, and predicted grades. The LA was initially unable to include data from social care as it required time-consuming manual entry.

A few years ago, the LA coordinated a process of revising the RONI, working with a number of schools that piloted the revised tool and provided feedback. This was facilitated by external funding. This resulted in the following indicator adjustments: dropping ethnicity and gender indicators, differentiating the weighting of low attendance by banded rates for greater nuance, adding in data from social care, and adding an 'instability in education' indicator. Predicted and achieved qualifications were also removed as the LA could no longer access this data.

## Effectiveness of RONI instruments

The LA reported that the new RONI tool offered increased context and accuracy, but they still appreciated the importance of schools supplementing the data with their knowledge about their pupils. Schools currently do not share this information back to the LA; however, the LA wishes to establish a process for sharing this data in the future.

**“What we're trying to do now is get them [schools] to utilise the RONI as a mechanism to cross reference with their own local knowledge and perhaps there needs to be some adaptation or way in which information comes back to us that ... shares that ... kind of local level knowledge.” – Careers Hub-G**

Schools see the RONI as a helpful tool to prioritise targeted support and interventions among large cohorts. They appreciate access to data for all year groups as it enables them to track changes over time. Schools find the RONI tool a reasonably accurate starting point, but they stressed the importance of their knowledge of young people to supplement the RONI data. Careers Leaders gather information on young people through consultation with other staff members, such as Attendance Officers or pastoral teams. One Careers Leader compiles an internal spreadsheet incorporating RONI data, further data from the school system (e.g. EHCP status), as well as qualitative data on the young person and any support received.

In terms of monitoring the tool's effectiveness, following the end of the formal revision process, the LA now receives ad hoc feedback from schools and plans to set up periodic formal reviews. Schools reported varied levels of feedback sharing: one has termly meetings with the LA, while another reported minimal contact.

## Interventions

Schools reported using the RONI data to help target support, mainly for Year 11 pupils and, in some cases, Year 10 pupils, if identified for early intervention. One school takes extra care to engage young people at risk of becoming NEET with career events offered to all young people. Another school prioritises them for meeting with Careers Advisors and puts on additional events for them, such as internship sessions for young people with an EHCP.

Careers Leaders stressed that a wide range of needs underlie the risk of becoming NEET, with each individual young person's circumstances considered in an ongoing process of targeting.

**“It's very much done on an individual basis per child, so we wouldn't necessarily think all of the Red RONIs are going to do this activity because it wouldn't be appropriate to them, because we target it on their individual needs.” – School-G**

Schools reported providing support in-house with support from the local Careers Hub. They delivered one-to-one careers guidance sessions and group events, including visits from local colleges or the DWP. Two schools organise a 'Next steps' day event. One Careers Leader stressed the importance of offering young people the opportunity to explore all career options at this event, as targeting options based on RONI ratings could be overly restrictive.

In terms of post-16 transitions, schools offer young people minimal support over the summer holidays, though the local Careers Hub puts on some events. Following results day, some schools track young people in their destinations. One school has developed relationships and data sharing agreements with some of the local colleges which, in mid-September, share a list of leavers who have taken up their places.

Regarding data on uptake and outcomes of support, the LA has a participation monitoring officer who tracks Year 11s' intended destinations, offered places, and actual destinations. Schools share intended and actual destinations data with the LA three times a year and receive outcomes data from the LA if their leavers drop out of

college. Schools try to engage those leavers who become NEET to support them and/or refer them to LA services. The LA expressed a wish to track more rigorously those who become NEET and link this data to their RONI to further assess the effectiveness of the tool.

**“One of the things we’d like to do is, we’re in the second year [of revising the RONI] now, is try and do some work around identifying who became NEET last year and what their RONI was and try and do a piece of work around that. I mean, our own resource to do that has limited us in doing that, but ultimately that’s what we’d like to do.” – LA-G**

### **Enablers and barriers**

#### **Enablers:**

- Strong collaboration and good relationships in and between the LA, Careers Hub, and schools, as well as post-16 providers, are the main enablers of the use of RONIs in this LA. This facilitates efficient data sharing and collaboration on intervention delivery and has enabled the recent revision of the RONI tool.
- Availability of additional sources of funding enables the LA to both drive strategy and provide delivery support to schools. Additional resources at schools included a Careers Administrator at one school whose administrative work freed up Careers Advisors to support young people.

#### **Barriers:**

- Lack of existing data on certain risk factors, namely, access to transport. The LA viewed barriers to accessing transport as a key indicator of risk; however, given their inability to identify which young people relied on public transport, they could not include it in the RONI tool.
- The LA said further staff capacity would be needed to monitor the effectiveness of updating the RONI indicators and the impact of expanding use to earlier year groups.
- Some schools cited staff not understanding the data and/or the RONI agenda. They thought that sharing the RONI data more widely and providing training to form tutors would support effective use.