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Rapid Evidence Review: Supporting young people who are not in employment, education or training to achieve their goals: What works

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Rapid Evidence Review: Supporting young people who are not in employment, education or training to achieve their goals:
What Works

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
List of tables.....	3
List of figures and charts.....	3
Glossary.....	4
1. Introduction.....	7
2. Methodology.....	14
3. Young people who are NEET.....	21
4. 'What works' and what might work in engaging young people.....	28
5. Support to move toward re-engagement with education, employment or training...	49
6. Sustainability and progression in education, employment or training.....	71
7. Prevention.....	78
8. Cross-cutting issues.....	79
9. Conclusions.....	92
Reference section.....	101
Annex A. workshop participants.....	107

List of tables

Table 4.1. Young people aged under 18* and 18-24* claiming benefits (average over a year based on a three-year average (2016, 2017, 2018)).....	29
Table 4.2. Careers Wales Data, 16-17 year olds	30

List of figures and charts

Chart 1.1. Young people in Wales not in education, employment or training, 2004-2021 (provisional).....	8
Figure 1.1. The COM-B Framework.....	9
Figure 3.1. Characteristics of young people aged 16-18 who are NEET' but 'open to learning' and re-engaging with EET	24
Figure 3.2. Characteristics of young people aged 16-18 who are who are NEET but 'undecided' about re-engaging with EET	25
Figure 3.3. Characteristics of young people aged 16-18 who are who are NEET and are stuck or regressing and unlikely to re-engage with EET (sustained NEET').....	26
40	
Figure 4.1. Characteristics, experiences or circumstances that can hold a young person back.....	40
Figure 5.1. The components of support	50
Figure 6.1. Sustaining and supporting progression in EET	73
Figure 8.1. Drivers of employment policy and extent of Welsh Government control or influence.....	91

Glossary

Acronym	Definition
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
AMHS	Adult Mental Health Services
APS	Annual Population Survey
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCW	Children's Commissioner for Wales
CfHI	Centre for Homelessness Impact
CfW	Communities for Work
CfW+	Communities for Work Plus
CPNfW	Co-production Network for Wales
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DBIS	Department for Business Innovation and Skills
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EC	European Commission
EET	Education Employment and/or Training
EPC	Engagement and Progress Coordinator
EPPI	The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESF	European Social Fund
ESJWL	Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language Group
ETC	Economy, Treasury and Constitution
EU	European Union
EYST	Ethnic Youth Support Team
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IAG	Information Advice and Guidance

IES	Institute for Employment Studies
IFS	Institute for Fiscal Studies
ILM	Intermediate Labour Market
ILO	International Labour Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPS	Individual Placement Support
JCP	Job Centre Plus
JGW+	Jobs Growth Wales Plus
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
JSA	Job Seekers Allowance
LDA	London Development Agency
LWI	Learning and Work Institute
NAfW	National Assembly for Wales
NAO	National Audit Office
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NESTA	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NHS	National Health Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFS	Office for Students
OoWS	Out of Work Service
PaCE	Parents Childcare and Employment
PHW	Public Health Wales
PIE	Psychologically Informed Environment
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
ReAct+	Redundancy Action Plus
RONIs	Risk of NEET Indicators
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SFR	Statistical First Release
SIA	Security Industry Authority
SPF	Shared Prosperity Fund

T4CYP	Together for Children and Young People
UC	Universal Credit
WAO	Wales Audit Office
WBL	Work Based Learning
WEFO	Welsh European Funding Office
WLHC	Work Limiting Health Condition
WWCLEG	What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth
YEPF	Youth Engagement and Progression Framework
YPG	Young Persons' Guarantee

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) provides under 25s in Wales with the offer of support to gain a place in education or training, find a job or become self-employed. The aim of this review is to order to inform the development of the YPG and this report is intended to help ensure that the YPG is informed by evidence of what works in supporting young people who are not in employment, education and training (who are 'NEET'). A companion report focuses upon the characteristics associated with a higher risk of disengaging from employment, education and training (EET) and considers how these characteristics can create barriers to engaging with EET.

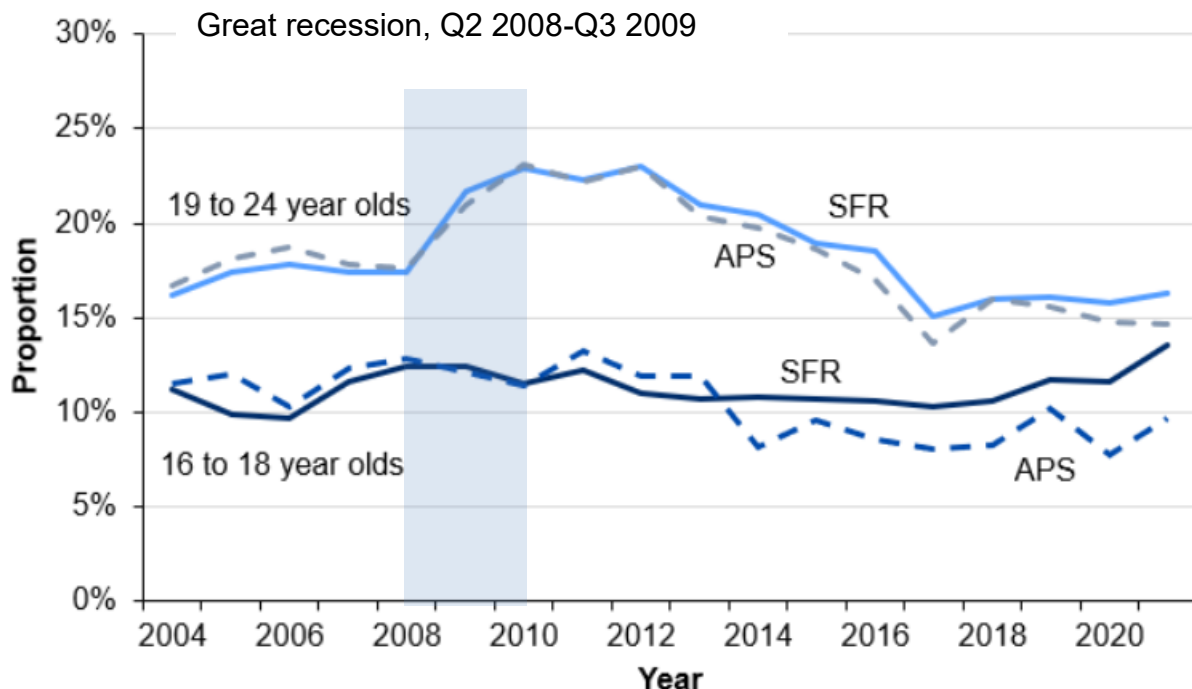
The impacts of unemployment and economic inactivity upon young people

- 1.2. Unemployment and economic inactivity are associated with lower levels of well-being and poorer mental and physical health, the effects of which can persist through a lifetime (described as 'scarring') (Arulampalam et al., 2001). Similar negative impacts are associated with an early exit from education (Schuller, 2017).

Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the economy

- 1.3. Young people are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns (DBIS, 2015) and, as Figure 1.1 illustrates, the percentage of young people aged 19-24 who are NEET tends to increase when economic conditions worsen. Such increases occurred during the great recession (2008-2010) and more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, even when the economy is growing and close to full employment, as in 2004-2005 (UK Parliament, 2015), the percentage of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET remains stubbornly high. In contrast, the percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who are NEET is consistently lower and less influenced by economic conditions but stubbornly stable. Successive policy initiatives have struggled to lower these base rates by more than a few percentage points, although interviewees for this study argued that, in the absence of policy initiatives such as the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) (discussed below), rates could be higher.

Chart 1.1. Young people in Wales not in education, employment or training, 2004-2021 (provisional)



Source: Young people in Wales not in education, employment or training, 2004-2021, Welsh Government, 2022c

SFR – Statistical First Release ¹; APS – Annual Population Survey ².

The COM-B model of behavioural change

1.4. A behaviour, such as effectively searching for work and applying for jobs, requires:

- the ability - or **capability** - to perform the behaviour (having the skills and knowledge required);

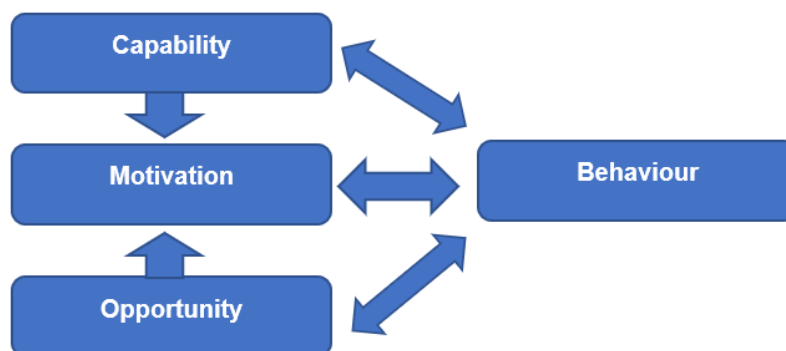
¹ The Statistical First Release (SFR) is considered ‘the most robust estimate of young people who are NEET’. It is based upon education data (including schools - the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC); further education and work-based learning (WBL) - Lifelong Learning Wales Record and the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Open University data); population estimates and the Annual Population Survey (APS) (which is used to estimate the proportion of those not in education or training who are unemployed or inactive) (Welsh Government, 2020b).

² The APS is a combined survey of households in Great Britain and collects data on social and socio-economic variables, including individuals’ economic activity. It is not directly comparable with the SFR, and ‘changes between consecutive rolling year estimates should not be used’ (ibid).

- the intention - or **motivation** - to perform the behaviour; and
- the absence of environment constraint (for example, not facing barriers such as childcare) **or** conversely - having the **opportunity** to perform the behaviour (Michie et al., 2011).

1.5. These three factors form the basis of the COM-B model. As Figure 1.1 illustrates, these factors are linked so that, for example, having confidence in the ability to successfully perform a behaviour such as searching for work and the opportunity to do so, can increase a young person's motivation to search for work. Conversely, limited opportunities (for example, due to caring responsibilities or digital exclusion) or limited capability (for example, ill health or limited experience and understanding of the labour market), can undermine motivation.

Figure 1.1. The COM-B Framework



Source: The COM-B Framework Michie et al., 2011

1.6. This model is discussed in depth in the review's first report which illustrates that, for many young people who are NEET, there is no single cause, instead it is the combination and interactions between factors (e.g. they may lack motivation as they have constrained capabilities) that holds young people back. Where the overall impact is greater than the sum of the individual parts, they can be said to have 'complex needs' (SEU, 2005).

Policy Context

1.7. The [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act](#) aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It sets out seven national goals, including a more prosperous and more equal Wales. In support of these goals, [the 2022 Employability and Skills Plan](#) aims to bring together Welsh Government led employability programmes to deliver a new single operating model³ from 2023; it also focuses upon:

- supporting young people by investing in and strengthening ‘the whole system approach to delivering the Young Person’s Guarantee’ (YPG);
- reducing economic inequality and increasing participation in the skills system for disabled people and Black Asian and minority ethnic groups;
- supporting people with a long-term health condition into work; and
- promoting fair work for all. (Welsh Government, 2022a)

The Young Person’s Guarantee

1.8. As outlined in the introduction, the YPG is the Welsh Government’s key commitment to provide everyone aged 16 to 24, living in Wales, with support to gain a place in education or training, help to get into work or self-employment (Welsh Government 2023a). The YPG provides an umbrella structure that sits above Welsh Government funded programmes for young people, aiming to fully utilise existing interventions, develop new ones and to create a straightforward journey for young people regardless of circumstances and background. The Working Wales service provides one simple route, although not the only route, to access the programmes and services.

The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework

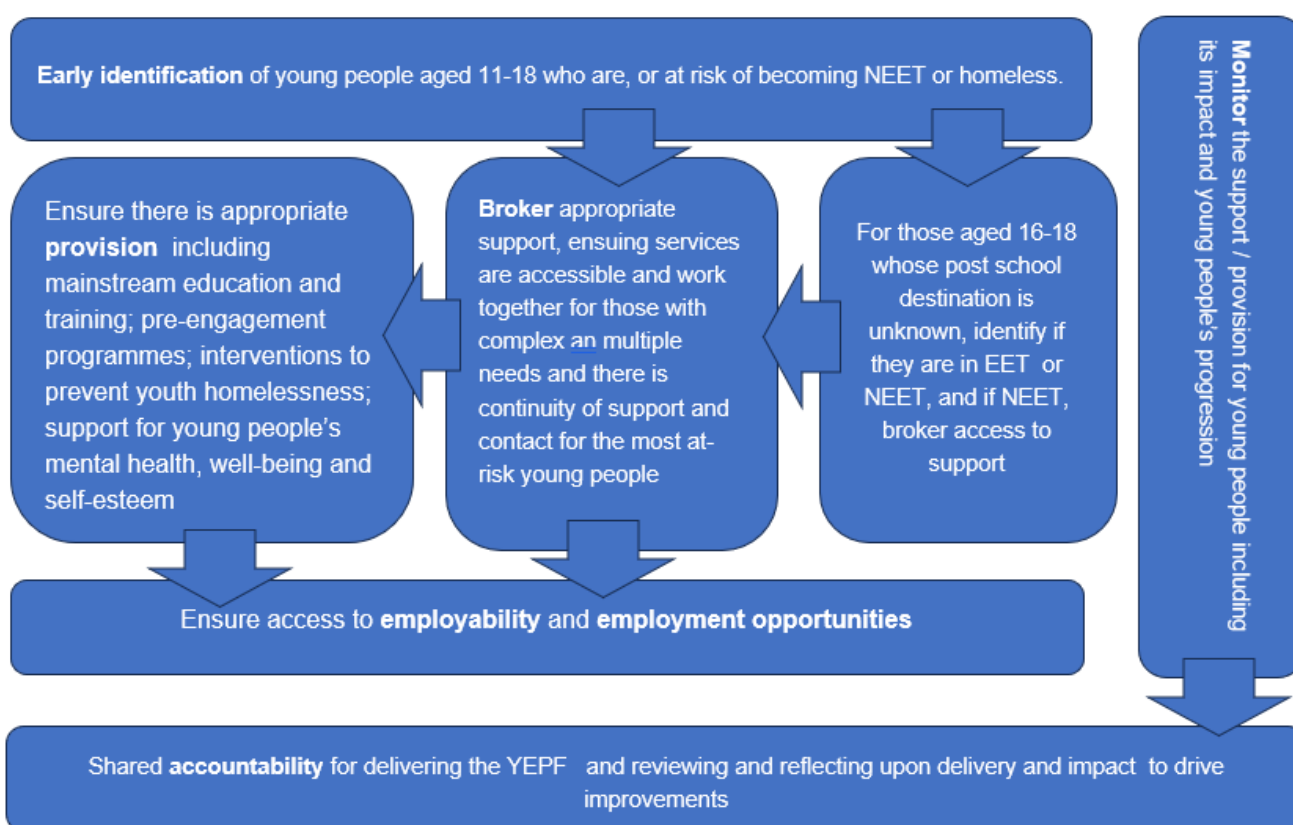
1.9. The YEPPF aims to reduce the number of young people who are NEET through early identification and prevention and is refocused upon early identification of young people aged 11 to 18 (rather than those aged 16 to 25) who are at risk of becoming

³ This model aims to bring together existing programmes such as ReAct+, Community Employability Programmes and Jobs Growth Wales Plus.

NEET and/or homeless.⁴ The YEPF and YPG therefore overlap for young people aged 16 to 18, to help provide a ‘safety net’ during the critical period when young people make transitions from, for example, school to college or to employment (Welsh Government, 2022b).

1.10. The YEPF has six core components: early identification, brokerage, monitoring progression, provision employability and employment opportunities, and accountability, illustrated by figure 1.2. below

Figure 1.2. the components of the YEPF



Source: Figure created for the review drawing upon Welsh Government 2023b

Research objectives

1.11. The focus of this second stage report is to identify:

⁴ Homelessness is included because of the overlap between risk factors for homelessness and the risk factors associate with an increased risk of being NEET.

- ‘What works’ to help young people with protected characteristics or complex barriers to enter and sustain education, employment and training?
- What lessons/good practice can be learned from other UK and international personalised approaches to overcoming cross-cutting barriers to young people’s participation?
- What are the interventions’ applicability to a Wales context? How well do they align with other Welsh Government strategies and priorities?
- What national, regional and local employment-related interventions are effective in improving participation? For whom do they work, in what circumstances, and what are the potential adverse consequences, viewed via an intersectional lens and situated in the current economic climate? What are the levers and barriers available in a Welsh context?
- How can services that support NEET young people join up with other services and employers to provide support for barriers, such as mental health, to accessing and sustaining employment at a local level in Wales?
- What can be said about the likely efficacy of youth guarantees (such as the one in Wales) for addressing the needs of young people who are economically inactive, who are willing and able to work but need support to overcome barriers first? What, if any, alternatives might be considered?
- How best to involve young people in youth initiatives and co-produce programmes that lead to meaningful outcomes for a diverse range of economically inactive young people?

What works? And what else might work?

1.12. As outlined in section 2, there is a large body of research literature examining interventions to support young people who are NEET. However, there are two important limitations to this evidential base:

- the interventions that have been robustly evaluated, and found to be effective, only work moderately well. This is because (i) the additional impact, in terms of young people entering employment is modest overall (often only around 10 percentage points) and (ii) the evidence of impact is stronger for some groups of young people (the evidence is often limited to those young people with the least

complex needs, who are more likely to engage with EET support programmes). Much existing provision is informed by this evidential base, which means that doing more of the same may not increase impact; and

- many voluntary sector interventions have not been subject to robust impact evaluations (IES, 2020).

1.13. Therefore, the paper considers both ‘what works’ (practice with a robust evidential base of effectiveness) and ‘what might work’ (unproven, but promising practice and ideas) in supporting ‘inactive’ NEET young people to overcome intersectional barriers to accessing and sustaining their work goals. These are interventions which have a plausible account of how and why they work, and can provide evidence of positive change, but which have not been subject to a robust impact evaluation.

Structure of the paper

1.14. The paper is structured into nine sections after this introductory section:

- section 2 discusses the approach and methodology;
- section 3 describes three groups of young people who are NEET and the implications for ‘what works’;
- section 4 outlines ‘what works’ and ‘what might work’ in engaging young people who are NEET;
- section 5 outlines ‘what works’ and ‘what might work’ in supporting young people who are NEET to move toward re-engaging with EET;
- section 6 outlines ‘what works’ and ‘what might work’ in supporting young people who were NEET to sustain their re-engagement and progress in EET;
- section 7 considers the importance of preventive action to help ensure young people do not become NEET;
- section 8 considers a number of cross-cutting themes, including issues related to delivery and implementation of programmes; the impact of context upon programme effectiveness; lessons from other youth guarantees and interventions applicable to a Welsh context; and
- section 9 outlines the review’s conclusions.

2. Methodology

- 2.1. As the main area of interest to the review (i.e. ‘what works’) has been so well researched, this is primarily a ‘review of reviews’ (Nesta, 2016) focusing upon reviews and research in Wales and the other UK nations undertaken in the last 15 years, complemented by a purposive review of selected studies and data, and a small number of qualitative interviews and discussions.

Search protocol

- 2.2. The main search terms used were: Review OR Evidence OR Evaluation AND “young people” AND Employment OR NEET OR Barriers. The search terms were used to search Google.co.uk; Google Scholar and JSTOR. In addition, the SITE search function was used to search specific websites including: gov.wales; gov.scot; gov.uk; and nidirect.gov.uk/ to include material published by the UK nations. Site searches were also made of the Evidence for Policy & Practice Information (EPPI) centre, Youth Futures Foundation, Learning and Work Institute (LWI), Institute of Employment Studies (IES) and the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) websites. Full details are included in the appendix.

Inclusion criteria

- 2.3. Based upon a review of the title and abstract, the review only included material that met the following inclusion criteria:
- was published in the last 15 years (since 2007); AND
 - was a literature or evidence review that focused upon:
 - ‘what works’ to help young people with protected characteristics or complex barriers enter and sustain EET; AND
 - was focused upon what works in the UK OR Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland or the Netherlands ⁵;
 - OR

⁵ Their gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is broadly similar but the percentage of young people who are NEET varies across these countries (OECD, 2022) providing opportunities to learn from countries such as the Netherlands, with lower rates than the UK.

- it involved primary research, such as an evaluation, to identify ‘what works’ for supporting young people who are NEET in Wales (i.e. it focuses upon an intervention in Wales)
AND it aimed to identify:
- ‘what works’ for supporting young people with protected characteristics or complex barriers (such as mental health difficulties or additional learning needs (ALN) enter and sustain EET;
OR
- identify lessons/good practice, including how services can join up with other services and employers;
OR
- how best to involve young people.

2.4. We did not include primary research studies (for example, based upon interviews with young people) unless they:

- involved primary research to identify the barriers for ‘seldom heard’ groups, such as disabled young people who are NEET or young people with ALN or mental health difficulties who are NEET;
AND
- involved primary research including young people in Wales;
AND
- were published in the last 15 years.

2.5. Given the breadth (and anticipated sensitivity⁶) of research terms, once saturation⁷ was reached and searches were no longer generating new or relevant results, they were stopped.

⁶ There is a trade-off between sensitivity or comprehensiveness and specificity or relevance. For this study sensitivity was prioritised over specificity, so it was more comprehensive, but at the cost of generating more irrelevant results.

⁷ Saturation is a concept used in qualitative research to describe a situation where no new ideas or themes are being identified, meaning that further data collection and/or analysis are unnecessary. In the context of this review, it was used to help judge when so few new items were being identified, that the diminishing returns of search effort, meant that the benefits of further searching were unlikely to be worth the effort required to identify additional items.

Purposive review of selected research and data

2.6. The purposive review focused upon areas or issues of particular interest to the study, which might not be adequately covered in the existing literature (and therefore potentially missed in the review of reviews); this focused upon identifying evidence related to:

- Young Person's Guarantees; and
- co-production in employment support programmes.

2.7. In addition, a snowball sampling approach was taken, following up articles and references in the literature identified through searches. This included a small number of studies published since 2000, rather than 2007.

Evaluating the quality, coverage and relevance of the data

2.8. In order to ensure the desk-based review did not include studies whose findings may not be valid (i.e. not robust) the quality of studies was assessed to consider both:

- internal validity (whether the study findings are accurate or, for example, the data accurately describes the population of interest); and
- external validity (whether the study findings can be generalised to other contexts).

2.9. Two broad types of evidence were considered: evaluations of interventions, to identify what works and research evidence, around, for example the barriers young people might face. Because their aims were different, two different standards of evidence were considered.

2.10. In evaluating evidence about 'what works', the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta) evidence standards (see boxed text) were used, and evidence that was at level 3 or over was included. Evidence at lower levels 1 and 2 was considered under 'what else might work' and treated as promising, but unproven practice.

Nesta Evidence Standards

- Level 1. ‘You can describe what you do and why it matters, logically, coherently and convincingly’.
- Level 2. ‘You capture data that shows positive change, but you cannot confirm you caused this’.
- Level 3. ‘You can demonstrate causality using a control or comparison group’.
- Level 4. ‘You have one + independent replication evaluation that confirms these conclusions’.
- Level 5. ‘You have manuals, systems and procedures to ensure consistent replication and positive impact’.

Adapted from Nesta (2013)

2.11. The review (and particularly the first report) also draws upon qualitative research studies in order to better understand the reasons why some young people are at a higher risk of being NEET and what else might work. The review assessed the ‘trustworthiness’ of qualitative research studies by considering its ‘credibility’⁸, ‘dependability’⁹, ‘confirmability’¹⁰ and ‘transferability’¹¹ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and the ‘validity and reliability of quantitative data’¹² (Bryman, 2016).

⁸ Credibility relies on how well the data describes the object of study and, for example, that respondents’ views and interpretations would match those of researchers and is analogous to the concept of internal validity. It encompasses confidence that the results are accurate, that they are believable and, for example, that they make sense and are coherent. Credibility can be built through the use of approaches such as triangulation, the likely strength of the research methods (for example, prolonged engagement can build credibility) and discussing and confirming findings with others.

⁹ Dependability is similar to the concept of reliability and describes how likely it is that findings would be repeated. Transparency in how research was conducted can give confidence that findings are dependable.

¹⁰ Confirmability describes the extent to which it is likely that findings are neutral or unbiased and would be corroborated or confirmed by other researchers. Clearly demonstrating how findings are drawn from the data can help build trust in its confirmability.

¹¹ Transferability is similar to the concept of external validity and describes how likely it is that findings can be generalised or transferred to other contexts. An assessment of the potential transferability of findings can be supported by rich or ‘thick’ descriptions of the context and generative mechanisms, so that their likelihood of operating in different contexts can be considered.

¹² For example, by considering sample sizes and characteristics (where relevant) to consider possible biases in the sample and the measures used (see UK Parliament, 2020).

Qualitative research to explore promising practice in Wales

2.12. The desk-based research was complemented by a small number of interviews with practitioners (n=7) involved in developing and/or delivering EET support interventions (in Wales) with:

- young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities; the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST);
- vulnerable young people, including those who are/at risk of homelessness or who have been excluded from school (GISDA and Sylfaen);
- young people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism or a learning disability (Engage to Change); and
- young people who were disaffected with or reluctant to engage with mainstream services (the Green Light project and Môn Cf's projects).

2.13. Data gathered from interviewees was considered as part of 'what else might work'. This was complemented by discussions with representatives from Careers Wales to discuss the data they held and how it could be used in the review.

The review's workshop

2.14. In order to share and discuss emerging findings and consider their applicability to the Welsh context, an online workshop with policy makers (n=14) was held. Details of participants are included in Annex A.

The strengths and weaknesses of the evidential base

2.15. The search strategy review was able to identify a wide range of literature that met the inclusion criteria, and often reached saturation, in the sense that different combinations of search terms identified the same studies. There was also, as the report outlines, often a fair degree of consensus in the findings from the studies considered. This triangulation gives confidence in the likely validity of findings.

2.16. However, it is widely recognised in the literature reviewed that the evidence base on 'what works' in the sense of being robustly evaluated, is limited; for example, as the reviews identify:

- ‘there is general agreement that evaluation of interventions has frequently been unable to provide robust evidence for effectiveness’ (Russell and Thompson 2022); and
- even when a programme is found to be effective, it is difficult to understand (or isolate or identify) which features of interventions are the most effective or make a difference (IES, 2020).

2.17. Limitations in terms of research design include:

- a lack of rigorous impact evaluation designs;
- few longitudinal studies based on sustained engagement with participants;
- a tendency to aggregate all positive measures (such as jobs, training, and education) together;
- a focus on employment entry, with no consistency in how retention, progression and job quality is measured;
- a failure to differentiate or distinguish between outcomes for different groups (for example, few studies specifically report on outcomes for disadvantaged groups such as care leavers and young carers and young offenders); and
- a failure to adequately consider the impact of context, such as the strength of local labour markets (IES, 2020; LWI, 2022; Russell and Thompson 2022);

2.18. In response, Mawn et al. (2017), in recognition of these gaps and limitations, summarise five main areas for future research:

‘First, there is still a need to establish what works to reengage young people. Notably, there is limited delivery and evaluation of interventions based on contemporary behaviour change theory and practice. Second, research is needed to establish what works for whom, particularly in light of interventions not serving some of the most disadvantaged. Third, it is not clear what aspects of interventions work (e.g. education and training, placement, counselling). Indeed, some arguably relevant approaches (e.g. psychological/ behaviour change interventions) have not been subject to evaluation, therefore their potential impact is unknown. Fourth, there is a scarcity of research applying theoretically underpinned interventions. Fifth, there is a dearth of research examining physical

and mental health outcomes, which is striking given the well-established negative impact of unemployment on physical and mental health.'

2.19. These were the types of gaps the use of the COM-B framework and qualitative research (outlined above) sought to help address.

3. Young people who are NEET

3.1. A key message from this rapid evidence review's first report (Welsh Government, 2024), is that young people who are NEET do not form a homogeneous group. Their diversity, in terms of capabilities, access to opportunities, motivations and behaviours is marked. Also, as a result of intersectionality and the ways that different dimensions of their identities and characteristics can shape their experiences, it can be difficult to generalise about young people who are NEET, as it is rarely a single factor or characteristic that defines their experiences. However, if young people are defined not by their specific characteristics, but by their orientation toward EET, it can be useful to think about three broad groups of young people:

- those who are 'in transition';
- those who are 'undecided'; and
- those who are 'stuck' or regressing (see boxed text).

The loss of capabilities, opportunities and/or motivation

As the review's first report (Welsh Government, 2024) outlines, disengagement may mean that young people can:

- lose capabilities they do not exercise (or use), for example when they lose confidence and/or their mental health deteriorates after leaving school;
- find it more difficult to access opportunities (for example, where employers are reluctant to take on young people without a work history) so that their social networks, and therefore access to information about opportunities, shrink;
- become disillusioned and demotivated, particularly where, for example, they feel they are constantly being 'rejected' or failing in some way; and/or
- develop behaviours that hold them back, such as sleeping late, drug or alcohol misuse and getting 'out of the habit' or routine of work.

This can create 'scarring' effects and mean the longer a young person is NEET, the more severe and/or complex their barriers are likely to be. As one interviewee

observed, 'the longer they are at home, the harder it is to get them back into education – the idea of going back becomes increasingly daunting'.

The size and character of each group

3.2. Amongst young people aged 16-18 who are NEET (approximately 14,000 young people in Wales¹³), it has been estimated that around:

- 40 per cent are 'cyclical', 'in transition' or 'open to learning', with generally positive attitudes toward education or training. These are very likely to re-engage in the short-term and therefore only need light touch support (which would equate to around 5,500 young people aged 16 to 18 in Wales);
- 20 per cent are 'undecided', unsure of, or unhappy with, the education or training offer available to them but do not face severe or complex barriers (which would equate to around 3,000 young people); and
- 40 per cent are 'stuck', or even regressing, 'sustained' NEETs who are likely to need more support as they face multiple barriers to re-engaging (Speilhofer et al., 2009); WAO, 2014) (which would equate to around 5,500 young people).

3.3. These three groups are represented in figures 3.1-3.3. Comparable quantitative data is not available for 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET (approximately 38,000 young people in Wales).¹⁴ Although it is common in the literature covering those aged 19 to 24 to identify three similar groupings, the sizes of each group may differ. Given scarring effects (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011) young people who have been NEET for longer (for example, since age 16 to 17) are likely to have more entrenched barriers.

3.4. In considering the size of the third group (which represents perhaps 40 per cent of young people who are NEET), those who are stuck or regressing, as the review's first report outlines, it is notable that:

¹³ As figure 1.1. illustrates, the numbers of young people who are NEET are volatile. For example, there were around 12,000 young people 16-18 who were NEET at the end of 2020 (Welsh Government, 2023e).

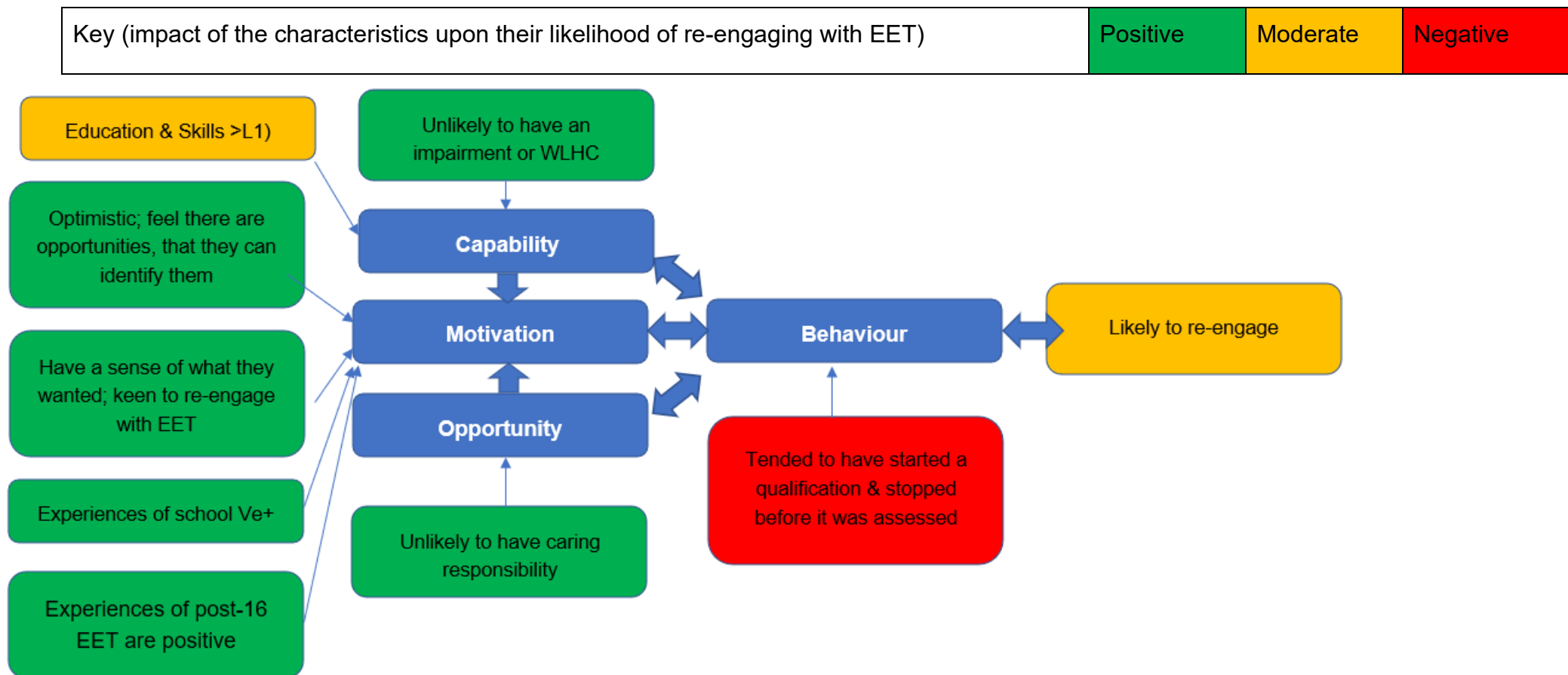
¹⁴ As figure 1.1. illustrates, the numbers of young people who are NEET are volatile and there has been a marked decline in the number of young people aged 16-24 who are NEET compared to the first half of the 2010s (Welsh Government, 2023e).

- more than one in five of all young people aged 16 to 24 is likely to have a mental health disorder (NHS Digital, 2022);
- around 15 per cent of all young people will have an ALN (Senedd Research, 2023); and
- around one in ten young people will have a neurodevelopmental condition such as autism or a learning disability (T4CYP, 2022).

3.5. There is a high degree of co-occurrence, so many young people with a neurodevelopmental condition will have more than one such condition, and many young people with a neurodevelopmental condition will also have a mental health difficulty and ALN (T4CYP, 2022). Although none of these conditions is determinative, that is to say they do not necessarily mean a young people with these characteristics will become NEET, as the review's first report outlines (Welsh Government, 2024), they all increase the risk that a young person will struggle to engage with EET.

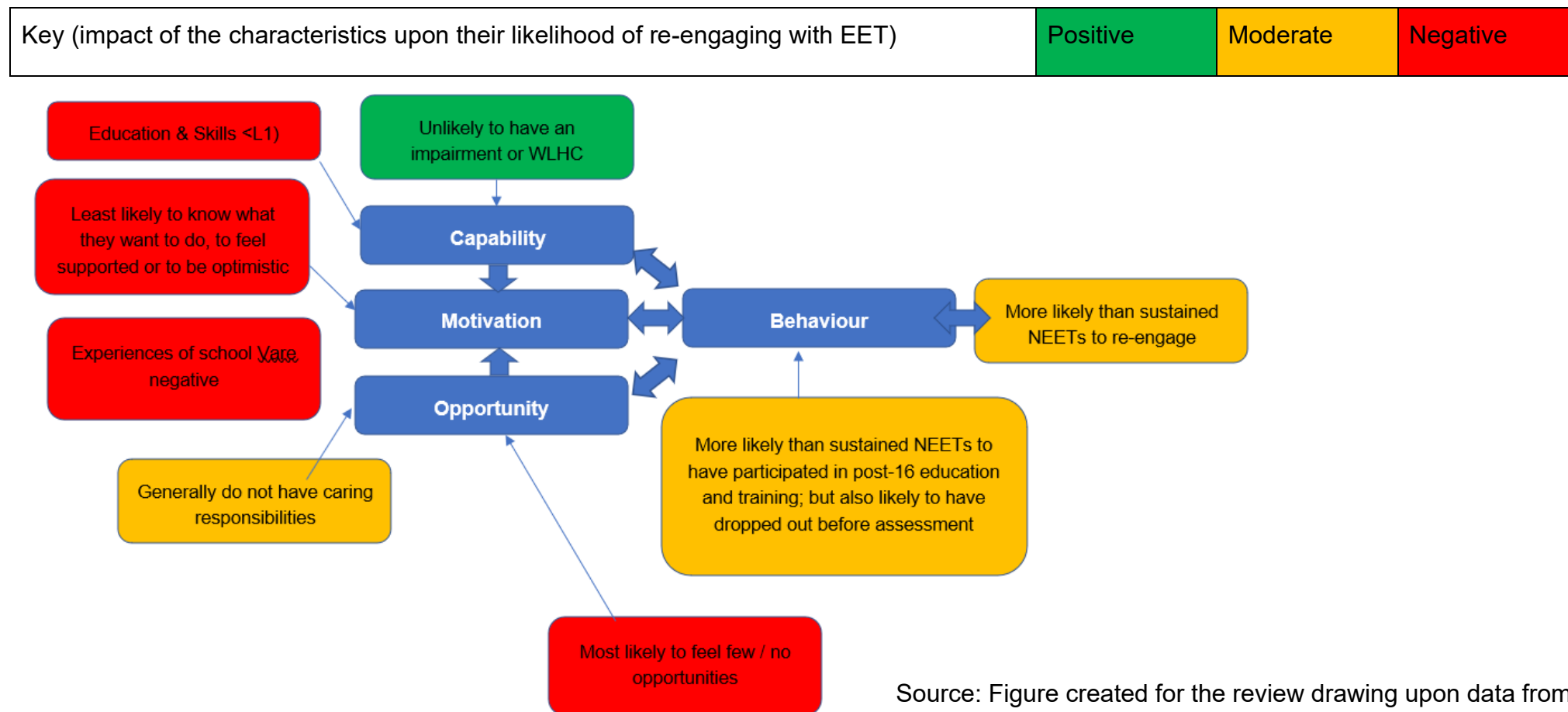
3.6. As the review's first report outlines (*ibid.*), young people can also be exposed to social and cultural factors, which increase their risk of becoming NEET. These include factors such as socioeconomic disadvantage (with around 30 per cent of children and 20 per cent of adults living in poverty), adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (with around 15 per cent of adults reporting four or more ACEs), discrimination or caring responsibilities. Like the other characteristics considered, these are not determinative, but increase the risk that a young person will struggle to engage with EET and can compound and interact with neurodevelopmental conditions or mental health difficulties.

Figure 3.1. Characteristics of young people aged 16-18 who are NEET' but 'open to learning' and re-engaging with EET



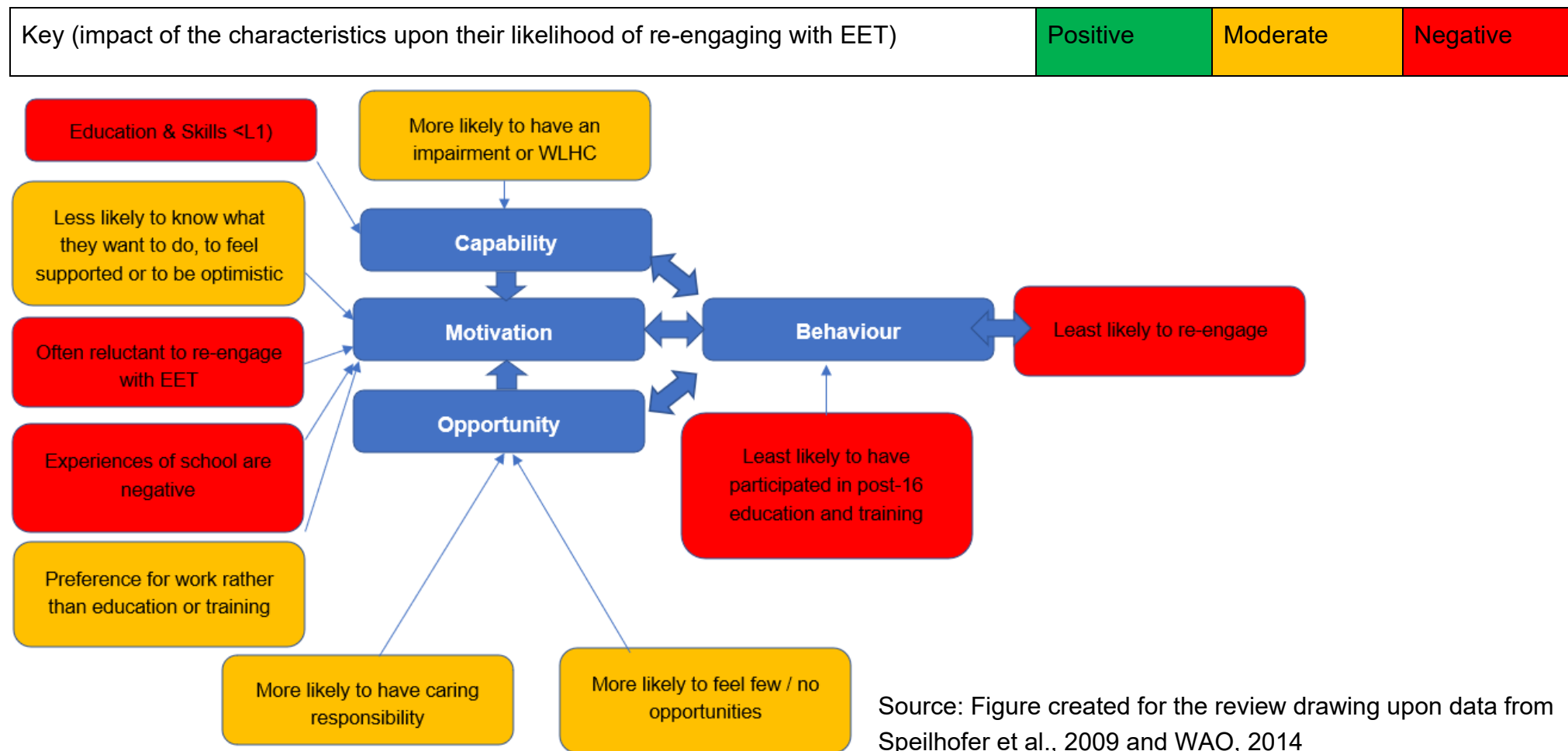
Source: Figure created for the review drawing upon data from Speilhofer et al., 2009 and WAO, 2014

Figure 3.2. Characteristics of young people aged 16-18 who are who are NEET but 'undecided' about re-engaging with EET



Source: Figure created for the review drawing upon data from Speilhofer et al., 2009 and WAO, 2014

Figure 3.3. Characteristics of young people aged 16-18 who are who are NEET and are stuck or regressing and unlikely to re-engage with EET (sustained NEET')



Source: Figure created for the review drawing upon data from Speilhofer et al., 2009 and WAO, 2014

Implications for what works

- 3.7. Given the differences in their characteristics (in terms of motivation, capabilities, behaviours and access to opportunities) it is reasonable to infer that different groups of young people will need different levels and types of support and therefore, a one size fits all approach will not work for all. This is another key message from the first phase of the YPG National Conversation (Welsh Government, 2023a) and is indirectly supported by the literature reviewed, which highlights the importance of flexible person-centred approaches. However, there is little evidence in the literature reviewed about the development of differing types of employment support designed to cater to different groups.
- 3.8. The findings also have implications for the targeting of programmes. Young people in the first and second groups are likely to be easier to engage, and easier to support into work, but also more likely to re-engage with EET without support (and therefore potentially in less need of support¹⁵). This may help explain the high levels of deadweight identified in impact evaluations; for example, as one recent review identified:
- ‘In the higher quality evaluations included here, an impact on employment was found, but the additional impact was often only around 10 percentage points (and often less). In other words, many of the participants would have gone on to get jobs without the evaluated support’ (IES, 2020, p.7)¹⁶.
- 3.9. Conversely, young people in the third group are likely to be harder to engage (and therefore less likely to be included in impact evaluations), and harder to support into work, but also less likely to re-engage with EET without support.

¹⁵ Although the first group – those in transition – are likely to re-engage without support; the prospects for young people in the second group – who are ‘undecided’ are more mixed. They may only need relatively light touch support, but that support may be enough to ‘tip’ them into re-engaging more swiftly than they would otherwise have done.

¹⁶ It is notable that studies that compare outcomes for those supported by a particular programme with a matched sample of young people who are not supported by that programme, do not exclude young people who may receive other types of support or encouragement to re-engage (for example, that offered by the DWP or education and training providers).

4. 'What works' and what might work in engaging young people

4.1. The YPG provides young people aged 16-25 with the offer of support to gain a place in education or training, find a job or become self-employed. However, although young people may want and would benefit from support, many do not take it up. This section discusses what is known about why and how many young people choose to engage with support and what works and what might work in engaging them¹⁷, and also why some choose not to engage. This is a key challenge; as an International Labour Office (ILO) review of European youth guarantees concluded: engaging 'non-registered NEETs', typically those with the most complex barriers, is seen as 'one of the most acute challenges that countries are facing in meeting the guidelines of the European Commission's (EC) recommendation' with regards the youth guarantee (ILO, 2017).

How many young people who are NEET are not engaging with EET support services?

4.2. Data on the number of young people who are NEET and are not engaging with EET support services in Wales is not known. Therefore, a number of proxy measures were considered:

- table 4.1 outlines the numbers and percentage of young people claiming benefits, as a measure of engagement with support services, suggesting around half of young people who are NEET are not claiming benefits (22,831 young people)¹⁸ and therefore also not accessing support from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); and
- table 4.2 outlines the numbers of young people aged 16 and 17 who are NEET or in tier 1 and 2 of Careers Wales [five tier framework](#) (5,129 young people).¹⁹

¹⁷ That is to say, interventions which have a plausible account of how and why they work, and can provide evidence of positive change, but which have not been subject to a robust impact evaluation.

¹⁸ It should be noted that not all young people who are NEET would be eligible for benefits and some young people who are not NEET would still be eligible for some benefits.

¹⁹ Young people in tier 1, are unknown to Careers Wales and young people in tier 2 are unemployed 16 and 17 year olds, known to Careers Wales, who are not available for EET. Those in tier 3, are also known to be unemployed, but are known to be actively seeking EET and either ready to enter EET, or assessed as requiring career management or employability skills support to enter EET. Those in tier 4 are young people who are engaged with EET, but judged at risk of dropping out and young people in tier 5 are young people with sustained engagement with EET.

4.3. Data on the numbers of young people accessing European Social Fund (ESF) EET support programmes was also sought (on the basis that most EET support programmes would have received some ESF monies, so the numbers could be used as a rough measure of engagement with all EET support services). However, it was not possible to calculate this as, for example, information on participants is only provided to the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) when the project has claimed for them and not necessarily when they were receiving the support.

Table 4.1. Young people aged under 18* and 18-24* claiming benefits (average over a year based on a three-year average (2016, 2017, 2018))

	Under 18*		18-24*	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Claiming JSA	20	0.3	3,486	8
Claiming ESA	217	3	11,064	25
Claimant (JSA + UC)	55	1	10,205	23
UC (not included JSA)	35	1	6,719	15
Not claiming ESA or JSA	7,030	97	29,550	67
Not claiming ESA or JSA or UC	6,995	96	22,831	51
Total YP who are NEET	7,267	100	44,100	100

**NEET population data had different age range to the DWP data JSA and ESA, therefore, an average year population was added to the NEET population data to reflect the same age range.*

4.4. Further details on the methodology used to create the data in table 4.1. is included in the appendix.

Table 4.2. Careers Wales Data, 16-17 year olds

	EET	NEET	T1	T2	T3	T4
Gender						
Male	32,752	1,244	679	987	257	1,768
Female	31,202	898	541	756	142	1,416
Other	43	6	2	6		6
Prefer not to Say	21	3	3	2	1	2
Unknown	2		1			
	1		1			
Total	64,021	2,151	1,227	1,751	400	3,192

4.5. While not designed to generate precise quantitative data, it is also worth noting that the YPG National Conversation (Welsh Government, 2023a) identifies that half of 16 to 24 year olds agreed that they did not feel well-prepared to do the course or get the job they wanted and the overwhelming majority of young people who have tried to apply for a job or do a course have been met with barriers.

4.6. Importantly, the YPG National Conversation also identifies that, while many young people want and would benefit from support, many are either unaware of, or reluctant to engage with, support services (for example, where they lack the confidence to do so). Indeed, many young people are lost, unsure, lacking direction, confused by the post-16 landscape²⁰ and/or feel it is unfair. ‘Accessing support isn’t something that has occurred to many young people’ (ibid., p. 73).

What motivates young people to engage with EET support services?

4.7. Two aspects, firstly the motivation to re-engage with EET; and secondly, the motivation to access EET support services, are important to consider. Young people who want to re-engage with EET are also more likely to engage with EET support services, but this cannot be taken for granted. As the YPG National Conversation (Welsh Government, 2023a) identifies, there is a lack of awareness of, and for some

²⁰ For example, as one contributor to the National Conversation put it, ‘It’s like Lego pieces, but they forgot the instructions, and you’re just left with all these things, and there’s no, any sort of clue of how to piece it together. And in the end, you give up because you’ve not got a clue’ (NEET participant, 16 to 18).

young people, a stigma attached to, and/or fears about accessing support services. This finding is highlighted in the wider literature (see SEU, 2005) and reflects, for example:

- weakness in EET support services in, for example, the way they are marketed and/or delivered to young people;
- young people's more generalised lack of trust or confidence in public services, which may have been exacerbated by the pandemic (see IMF 2022) or fears about 'officialdom', which may be more common amongst some groups such as Black, Asian and minority ethnic young people or immigrants; and/or
- young people's own anxieties and lack of self-confidence, which can be exacerbated by mental health difficulties and/or neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism, which can make them reluctant to, for example, interact with others in large groups and/or risk adverse reactions (and, for example, reluctance to try to take up opportunities as doing so would also expose themselves to the risk of failure).

4.8. Conversely, young people who do not want and/or do not feel ready to re-engage with EET are less likely to engage with EET support services. Some reviews suggest attitudinal barriers (to re-engaging with EET) amongst disadvantaged young people are the key barrier they face (Martin and Grubb, 2001). Although the review's first report (Welsh Government, 2024) suggests that, while attitudinal barriers which manifest in a lack of motivation are a key barrier, they are typically more often symptom than cause, in the sense that they are rooted in, for example, perceptions of limited capabilities and/or lack of opportunity. There is therefore little evidence of so called 'feckless' youth or an underclass, which does not want to and chooses not to work and instead wants to subsist on benefits (see for example, Murray, 1990, a seminal work on the idea of an 'underclass').

4.9. However, while young people (including those who are NEET) generally express a desire to work, (LWI, 2022) and indeed, want the same things as most young people; money, an interesting job and a family (SEU, 2005):

- this does not translate into a willingness to take any job;

- the employment opportunities for those with limited capabilities (in terms of skills) and who, for example, find it difficult to travel, can be limited and unattractive (see boxed text on the next page); and
- there is often a lack of clarity about aspirations and/or how to achieve them ²¹ (Watkins, 2019). As interviewees observed, this may be particularly pronounced for some groups, such as refugees, with limited knowledge or experience of the UK labour market (see Welsh Government, 2020a).

4.10. As Williamson observes:

‘The kinds of jobs (and the kinds of training) that will become and be made available. ... may not be those that young people are happy or willing to take up. Does that matter? The answer is mixed. We have to understand what young people really want and, at the next level, what they are willing to consider as a ‘trade off’. What they really want is an intrinsically satisfying job that pays well. Many will not achieve that. We have then to emphasise, in policy, the need for contact, engagement, dialogue and judgement about the range of vocational, educational and cultural possibilities and opportunities that might be made available. Many young people will be receptive to some such options, even if they are not really what they want. But they will consider them if the basis of participation provides them with different benefits: relationships with supportive adults, meaningful activities and so on’ (Williamson, 2010, p.18).

4.11. Therefore, rather than a lack of aspiration, much of the research focuses upon:

- constraints on young people’s capabilities, such as low skills and/or mental health difficulties; and/or
- weakness in local labour markets

as the underlying factors that demotivate young people (see e.g. Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016).

²¹ As the YPG National Conversation identifies, young people’s aspirations are sometimes unclear or unformed, and/or they lack understanding of how to plan to achieve them.

What are your options?

A key message from the review is the importance of empathy and of seeing things through the eyes of young people; for example, as one interviewee (for the review) described, for those with few or no qualifications, they will be considering:

- the poor quality of work that is open to young people in, for example, food manufacturing, care, construction or retail; work that can be poor in terms of pay and treatment at work (with, for example, reports of toxic workplace cultures with widespread bullying) which offers little status, security or reward, and which is poles apart from young people's aspirations and/or expectations of what work should be like, given unrealistic expectations fuelled by social media and television;
- viable alternatives in the informal/illegal sector, such as drug dealing or sex work, which can offer 'easy money' and, in the case of drug dealing, a type of status; and/or
- alternative roles, such as being a 'full time mum' (which do not involve economic activity) or alternative lifestyles, such as drug use or gaming (which do not involve work or study).

Interviewees (for the review) observed that some alternative lifestyles can be addictive, offer fun, a sense of community and potentially status where, for example, success means becoming the 'big dog' in a role-playing game. It was also observed that these alternative lifestyles can be 'enabled' by parents who continue to support young people living at home and these behaviours could also create powerful social norms and the 'fear of missing out', which can discourage others from working.

This is supported by Williamson who argues those young people who are NEET and who are 'deeply alienated', include both those who have disengaged because they have 'switched off' and those who 'had switched on to something else'; as he puts it:

'There were the purposeful, who had discovered 'alternative ways of living' within the informal and illegal economies, and there were the purposeless,

who had given up and were whiling their lives away under the influence of alcohol and illegal drugs’.

He concludes that ‘neither of these groups would be easy to persuade to return’.
(Williamson, 2010, p.16).

- 4.12. It is also important to note that, even if young people do not want to re-engage with EET at this point or stage in their lives (potential turning points are discussed in section 5), this does not necessarily mean they will not engage with EET support services. Young people who are not looking to engage with EET may have other motivations for engaging with support services, such as the desire to relieve boredom and ‘to do something’, to gain skills, to take up financial incentives (such as training allowances) and/or avoid financial sanctions (such as penalties for breaches of welfare conditions).

What works: identifying young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET

Tracking young people ‘at risk’ or who have already disengaged

- 4.13. A key part of engagement strategies are systems to ensure young people in need of, and who would benefit from, support can be identified (IES, 2020). In Wales, a Welsh Government review concluded that ‘the evidence shows that a focus on attendance, behaviour and attainment will identify the majority of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET’ (Welsh Government, 2013, p.33). As the boxed text illustrates, this was taken forward in Wales through the development of the YEPF. Tracking of the 17 to 24 year old cohort is considered much harder, (given, for example, the difficulties tracking an entire cohort of 19-24 year olds across multiple settings) and this was reported by interviewees (for this review) to be one reason why the YEPF was refocused upon 11 to 18 year olds.

The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework

The 2013 the YEPF implementation plan aimed to ‘develop a consistent approach to the development and use of early identification systems across Wales ²², including ‘developing effective early identification systems pre-16 and ongoing identification systems post-16 ²³’ (Welsh Government, 2013, p.17). The 2015 evaluation of the YEPF identified that ‘in general, processes for identifying young people who are at risk of disengaging were less well-developed for the 16-18 age group than the pre-16s’ (Welsh Government, 2015). Since then, the introduction of the Careers Wales five tier framework, and the refocusing upon those aged 11-18, is reported by interviewees to have improved tracking, although the numbers of young people Careers Wales identify as NEET, are lower than the official statistics.²⁴

- 4.14. In England, Risk of NEET Indicators (RONIs) tailored to local NEET populations (the main dimensions of risk locally) have been developed (IES, 2020). However, evidence of their efficacy is mixed, and it is reported that ‘in general, it is difficult to identify individual characteristics at age 14-16 that could be used to strongly predict those who are more likely to experience particularly poor labour market outcomes at age 25, especially those who end up NEET’ (Dickerson et al. (2020) cited in IES, 2020).²⁵
- 4.15. A key challenge is identifying young people often described as ‘under the radar’, who may, for example, have retreated to their bedrooms during or after the pandemic and are not claiming benefits (and are therefore less visible), or who are working in the

²² These were to focus upon, in particular, attendance, behaviour and attainment indicators to identify ‘the majority of young people who are at risk of not making positive progressions at 16’ (Welsh Government, 2013).

²³ These focused upon education or training settings’ ‘own systems of identifying young people at risk of dropping out and the Careers Wales identification system’ (ibid., p.20).

²⁴ In part, this is thought to be because the Careers Wales cohort is focused upon two year groups (young people who would be in years 12 and 13, if they continued in education, rather than all young people aged 16-18.

²⁵ In Wales, guidance on early identification of risk of NEET under the YEPF was published in 2014. The effectiveness of this has not been evaluated.

informal economy²⁶ (and who are therefore not engaging with EET support services). There are also concerns about school age young people who are not enrolled in schools, if their home education is not suitable²⁷, and who are at greater risk of becoming NEET (CCW, 2021). However, the numbers are relatively small²⁸, and there is more focus in the literature on the larger numbers of those aged 16 to 18 who have left school and are NEET. Because they are less visible and are not engaged, there is little evidence on 'what works' with this group (IES, 2020, p.8).

Reaching out to those who are identified

- 4.16. Pro-active outreach activities to engage young people who have been identified and who meet the entry criteria can be effective (and also often necessary) (IES, 2020). This can include, for example, the role of trusted adults and also potentially peers, in communicating information about the potential risks and benefits of engagement (for example, financial and social) and in encouraging young people. This is a key feature of the YEPF, but as noted above, arrangements are less developed for those aged over 19 and over who are considered harder to track and identify.

Referrals and direct recruitment

- 4.17. As well as pro-actively seeking to identify and reach out to young people who are, or are at risk of, becoming NEET, services can engage young people through referrals from partners and direct recruitment / self-referrals (for example, where young people seek support from Working Wales or Careers Wales). Evaluations of programmes like Communities for Work (CfW) and Communities for Work Plus (CfW+) suggest that referrals from partners are important and provide a valuable 'pipeline'. Clear

²⁶ This would include activities that would be legal, such as construction and driving jobs, but which are hidden in order to avoid regulation and/or taxes; activities which may have legal and also illegal components, such as sex work (where the exchange of sexual services for money is legal but soliciting is not, and activities such as theft that are always illegal).

²⁷ As one interviewee observed, some families de-register their children in response to the threat of fines or non-attendance at school, but do not have the resources for home education. However, schools may see this as a way out of damaging their attendance record. The interviewee reported that if a family de-registers a child it removes the prospect of being fined, but for some children/ young people it marks the end of education. They reported that the local authority can visit to see what home education is provided, and if they are unhappy, they can make a school attendance order but this just puts the family back where they were, under threat of fines and does not change anything. If the young person is 15 years old the family can hold on for a few months and stall the local authority until they can legally leave education.

²⁸ In September 2021 to August 2022 4,681 children were known to be electively home educated in Wales (Welsh Government, 2022)

referral pathways and 'warm handovers' between referral agencies and programmes/projects are reported to be important in translating initial engagement, which may not be focused upon seeking employment support, into engagement with employment support. However, Job Centre Plus (JCP) is the main source of referrals for CfW and CfW+, with fewer than anticipated referrals from partners such as Working Wales (Welsh Government, 2023b). Moreover, as noted, as many as half young people who are NEET do not engage with JCP. Data from the YPG National Conversation also suggest that relatively small numbers of young people self-refer to EET support services²⁹ (Welsh Government, 2023a).

4.18. However, data from Working Wales suggests a more nuanced picture. Young people in Tier 2 (who are NEET, known to Careers Wales, but who are not available for EET, e.g. due to the complexity of their barriers) are usually referred to Working Wales. In contrast though, young people in Tier 3 (who are NEET, known to Careers Wales, and who are available for EE) mainly self-refer to Working Wales (pers. com. Working Wales)

What works: EET support services offer

4.19. Once a young person who is, or is judged to be, at risk of becoming NEET is identified, referred, or presents to an EET support service:

- the service's offer must be attractive enough to motivate, engage and sustain the young person's engagement; and
- the young person needs the capability and opportunity to engage with the EET support service (IES, 2020).

4.20. The challenge is that many of the reasons why young people are NEET, or at greater risk of becoming NEET, such as constrained capabilities, weak motivation, limited access to opportunities (for example, due to situational barriers such as caring responsibilities) and/or risky behaviours (such as drug and alcohol misuse), can also discourage or hinder their engagement with support services.

²⁹ The YPG National Conversation identified that 'those who had accessed support had typically been made aware of it indirectly through other professionals or organisations, rather than the young person finding out and accessing support through their own means' (Welsh Government, 2023a, p.42).

What do young people want?

4.21. Young people who are motivated to re-engage with EET (and who are either ‘in transition’ or ‘undecided’ and who would fall into the first or second groups outlined in section 3), may primarily look for support to help them realise their aspirations. Their own understanding of the barriers they face, and the support offer made to them are therefore both important. If, for example, all they think they need is advice, the offer of training may not be attractive. More broadly, young people (like most people) want services that they feel respect them, that feels human or person-centred. Therefore, positive experiences of support services can encourage them, whereas negative experiences can discourage or demotivate them. For example, as the YPG National Conversation identified:

There were indications that once they had had a positive experience of seeking/receiving support, their awareness of, and propensity to engage with - and ask for support from - other organisations/ people increased. (p. 49, Welsh Government, 2023a).

4.22. In contrast, as outlined above, young people who are not strongly motivated to re-engage with EET (such as those in the third group outlined in section 3, who are ‘stuck’), are more likely to need other ‘magnets’ to motivate them; for example, Steer (2000) cited in IES (2020) argues for ‘cultural magnets such as music, sports, or arts, and/ or financial magnets, for example, cash vouchers or payment for regular attendance’ which it is reported can be important attractors. Other attractors include ‘residential trips, use of leisure facilities and access to technology (computers and recording equipment) ... along with youth workers who have charisma, leadership skills and the ability to relate to young people’. There is less evidence of effectiveness of magnets for those aged 18 to 24 (IES, 2020).

4.23. More broadly, some young people who are struggling may not necessarily be looking specifically for support to help them re-engage with EET; for example, the evaluation of the Out of Work Service (OoWS)³⁰ identified that participants ‘were attracted to the

³⁰ The project provides non-judgmental peer mentoring support for people recovering from substance misuse and/or mental ill-health. It is delivered by peers who themselves have the lived experience of having recovered from substance misuse and/or mental ill-health.

OoWS initially to get support with health and wellbeing challenges. Gaining employment and work-related training was a less common reason for joining the programme' (Welsh Government, 2023c, p.2). However, this is likely in part to be a result of the context in which the programme was operating when the evaluation was carried out, as during the pandemic, participants' health and wellbeing needs increased and they were more interested at that time in the support peer mentors provided for their health and wellbeing challenges rather than support to look for work. It is reported by Welsh Government staff that as restrictions have eased, and participants' health and wellbeing has improved, more participants are now seeking support primarily to find work.

- 4.24. As figure 4.1 illustrates, interviewees from the Green Light project³¹ emphasised that it is also important to understand what other magnets young people perceive, which might attract them away from EET support services or may hold them back.

³¹ The project supports people who are unemployed, under-employed or long to change careers. The project works with people to create a personal development plan and identify the support that would help, ranging from CV building, developing personal skills, qualifications (e.g. CSCS and first aid), to careers guidance and planning and support to apply for jobs and/or courses.

Figure 4.1. Characteristics, experiences or circumstances that can hold a young person back



Source: Created for the review

* The concept of mental bandwidth is derived from the work of Mullainathan and Shafir (2013), who highlighted how the demands which come with poverty weigh upon people's mental energy and capacity, identifying that scarcity meant that the poor were more likely to make mistakes and bad decisions than those with higher incomes.

Financial incentives to engage

4.25. Financial incentives, such as training allowances, are reported to be more effective if they are widely known among their target group and if the administrative process to receive them is not overly bureaucratic (DfE, 2010; Welsh Government, 2019; Green and Taylor, 2020). There is also evidence that the expectation of financial gain is a key motivator, and that 'better off' calculations, illustrating the potential impact of moving into employment (which are a common feature of EET programmes), may also help, but this element has not been robustly evaluated Green et al. (2015, cited in Green and Taylor, 2020). Within Wales:

- JGW+ offers a training allowance for those aged 16-19 attending JGW+ provision;
- the Education Maintenance Allowance offers financial support for young people aged 16-18 who want to continue their education after leaving school; and
- the Welsh Government Learning Grant, is a means tested grant for those aged 19 and over, looking to continue their learning in further education.

4.26. However, research suggests that financial incentives may not work well with some groups; for example:

- personal motivation and the quality of working relationships between young people and advisors or mentors are reported to be more effective than financial incentives amongst some groups, such as individuals with a drug or alcohol dependence (Green and Taylor, 2020);

- young people’s calculation of risks³² and non-monetary costs (such as the time required) as well as the potential financial rewards are also important (SEU, 2005); and
- young people’s decisions and behaviours are rarely purely ‘rational’ (in the sense of maximizing financial gain) as factors such as emotions, social norms and stigma, can all shape their decision making (ILO, 2017; React, 2022).

4.27. The evidence base in relation to financial penalties, such as the reduction or withdrawal of welfare benefits, is mixed; as one review identifies:

‘The consensus of the evidence is that compulsion to take part in interviews with caseworkers and in job search or face loss of benefits does seem to have an impact on worklessness, although it is not found consistently, and may not be large’ (LDA, 2006).

4.28. As noted above, young people’s decision making is rarely limited to financial considerations nor purely ‘rational’ (React, 2022) and those who engage voluntarily may be more motivated (Green and Taylor, 2020). In this context, it is also important to bear in mind that welfare conditionality means many schemes are mandatory for those claiming certain benefits (IES, 2020).

4.29. Moreover, as outlined above, young people’s lack of motivation is often more a symptom of other underlying constraints, linked to a lack of capabilities and/or opportunities. These constraints are not removed by financial incentives and what has been described as the reliance upon ‘relatively mechanistic sanctions and incentives regimes to try to influence behaviour’ (SEU, 2005, p.39; Stewart and Wright, 2014).

³² For example, there is evidence from the YPG National Conversation that fears that an individual or their household will be worse off financially (as result of the loss of benefits) can undermine young people’s motivation, particularly amongst those claiming disability or carer-related benefits. This is consistent with the psychological literature which highlights loss aversion (a cognitive bias which means people’s fear of potential losses is greater than their hope of potential gains) (Kahaneman, 2011).

What else might work?

4.30. A range of ideas and unproved approaches to identifying and engaging young people were put forward by interviewees, participants in the review's workshop and in the literature reviewed.

Building awareness and encouraging young people to engage with support services

4.31. Encouraging self-referrals, most commonly through social media campaigns as, for example, the Gen Z report advocates (Golley Slater, 2023) and less commonly, through word of mouth recommendations and peer engagement, is likely to be helpful. Evidence from Connecting Communities points to an important role for local people in encouraging their neighbours to take steps towards positive change for themselves and their communities Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), (cited in Green and Taylor, 2020);

4.32. There was also interest in the review's workshop in:

- 'influencing the influencers' as one contributor put it; 'reaching the parents / family / community' around the young person'; and
- 'the role of detached youth work in reaching out to those who were isolated'.

Finding and creating 'magnets' to engage young people

4.33. As one interviewee put it, 'you have to find something you can hold onto, build their confidence and trust'. This includes, but is not limited to, the offer of employment support; for example, this could include community-based learning and activities with clear progression routes for engaging seldom heard participants, such as women with low skill levels who have young children (Green and Taylor, 2020), while as Williamson observes:

'As a youth worker, I have always been deeply troubled when I have worked with young people whose primary preoccupation seems to be 'killing time'. Surely it is possible to find forms of purposeful activity that may not be directly or immediately linked to the labour market but which may provide motivation, 'occupation', interest and direction in these young people's lives. There may not be jobs, but there must be other things to do, although the development of such provision requires both careful listening and negotiation. It is not what most of

these young people want – they want work, or education and training that leads to work – but they may be receptive to a more constructive use of their time rather than simply whiling it away’. (Williamson, 2010, p.8).

- 4.34. These approaches require an awareness of the offer (i.e. young people know about it); an offer that is considered attractive; and particularly where the offer is about support, an offer that young people can have confidence in that it can and will help them.

Speed, responsiveness and reliability

- 4.35. Interviewees observed that young people’s motivation to re-engage could be transitional and/or fragile, and therefore it was vital that when either open to re-engaging or having made the decision to re-engage, they were not then forced to wait. They observed that waiting could mean the moment (or opportunity) was lost; however, delay could be inevitable when, for example, provision was not immediately available or there were already waiting lists. Being open and honest with young people, to ensure their expectations were realistic, and trying to find ways to ‘hold onto’ them while they waited, were suggested.
- 4.36. Interviewees also observed that young people’s fragile motivation to re-engage could be rooted in a lack of confidence in and/or trust in public services, Therefore, it was important not to let young people down as, if this happened, this risked confirming and reinforcing their lack of trust in services, making future re-engagement with them even more difficult; The importance of effective delivery is discussed further in section 8.

Targeted work with minority groups

- 4.37. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) argues that targeted rather than ethnicity-blind approaches are required. These would focus on the specific barriers and needs of different Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups with higher levels of unemployment and economic inactivity. Given low levels of awareness of, and confidence and trust in, public services, encouragement and reassurance by trusted intermediaries known within the community are seen as critical in encouraging initial engagement (Green and Taylor, 2020). This point was also made by interviewees for

this review. Within Wales, while there were examples of ESF supported projects such as Sova's Achieving Change through Employment project, which focused upon supporting Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, these have now ended (as the ESF programme has ended in Wales).

Enhancing access to opportunities

- 4.38. Interviewees observed that in rural areas, young people might have to travel long distances, which was often difficult if they did not have access to private transport, as public transport could be expensive, unreliable, and may not easily connect young people and EET opportunities. Actions to address this, such as [Fflecsi bus services](#)³³ (although reported to be far from universally popular amongst those interviewed) and the hub-and-spoke approach in the Rural Pathways strategy³⁴ were welcomed (by interviewees for the review).
- 4.39. More broadly, interviewees (for the review) advocated enhancing the physical and psychological accessibility of EET support services through local (community) place-based delivery of support. In this context, it is worth noting that the evaluation of CfW and CfW+ identified that, while a community base could facilitate and might be necessary for engagements, the mere fact of being in a community was rarely sufficient to engage young people (Welsh Government, 2023b). The example of the Môn Communities Forward (CF) [Expanding Môn's Horizons project](#), (see below) highlights that a physical base in communities is only part of a broader engagement strategy.

Môn CF: engaging young people

As an interviewee described, it is the initial engagement of young people, 'getting them through the door' that is difficult. They reported that since the pandemic it had become more difficult to engage young people and some were not registered with anyone and had 'no get up and go' and/or 'were comfortable at home'. In response,

³³ Fflecsi buses serve an area, rather than fixed route, and must be booked, but provide greater flexibility, as their routes change depending upon where their passengers want to go.

³⁴ The Welsh Government Rural Pathway strategy takes a hub-and-spoke approach to link isolated communities to their local village or town, which in turn provides access to other connections further afield.

as well as common practices like working with partners and local organisations, as they put it, they have to ‘think outside the box’; this included:

- working with an online ‘gaming’ initiative based in the town centre to provide opportunities to begin conversations with young people;
- identifying and focusing upon what young people want; for example, they described how they introduced ‘barista’ training because the young people think that’s ‘cool’ and it was also more informal (not classroom based) and there was also demand for such jobs in the area;
- employing staff (in this case mentors) who work with young people on ‘their level’, who ‘can talk with them not judge them’. They described how ‘lots of [other] organisations say that, but it’s not always true’. To ensure this, they described employing a number of mentors with lived experience, who had themselves been supported by other Môn CF projects and people from ‘different backgrounds’, who helped bring diversity of experiences, but who all had been through a ‘lot of training’, an issue picked up in section 8.

The visibility (including offices on the high street) and reputation of the organisation, built over a decade, was also reported to be important. This meant people were both aware of it and its staff, as ‘the place to go’ for help, and were confident or trusted that it was likely they could help (Welsh Government, Forthcoming). They also described how in schools they try and work with those at risk of becoming NEET, which meant even if they do become NEET later, they knew Môn CF and ‘it’s less scary for them’ [because of this].

The interviewee explained that once they had ‘got them through the door’ (and made that initial engagement) they could then work to begin to gain young people’s trust and then help them. They described how they focus on confidence building to start with, and how ‘some young people come in with mum and dad to start for first and second session and by the third session we’ve gained their trust’.

Source: interviews (for the review)

4.40. As noted, as well as motivation, young people need the capability and opportunity to engage with employment support; therefore:

- what has been described as ‘stabilisation’, ensuring that people’s basic needs are met, so they have the capability and can develop the motivation to engage with employment support, has been identified as potentially important (Green and Taylor, 2020); and
- where this is not possible, waiting until a young person is ready and able to engage with support services and, as one contributor to the workshop suggested, the ‘need for multiple/repeat interventions to engage [some] young people’. Also, as an interviewee observed, ‘patience’; it can happen ‘eventually because they [the EET support service] are persistent and stick with it’.

4.41. The difficulty of engaging a young person who is not (yet) ready to change is illustrated by Kate’s story, outlined below in the boxed text.

Waiting for the turning point

Kate (not her real name) is an intelligent girl in her 20s who, despite a difficult family life, including a mother who abused her and a father who dealt drugs, did well at school and secured an engineering apprenticeship. It looked as if she had a bright future ahead of her, until she relapsed and began abusing drugs again, missing work and eventually losing her apprenticeship. She started earning money on the Only Fans website, initially on an occasional, and then on a more regular basis. She now works in the informal economy as a sex worker. Her prospects for re-engagement look poor, until, for example, she experiences a turning point in her life at which time she may reassess her goals.

Source: interviews (for the review)

4.42. Equally, it was argued by one of the interviewees that ‘work is a stabilising influence’ and so getting a young person into work and then supporting them with on the job training, help to get and manage accommodation, help with mental health, travel training and independent living support is often more productive than dealing with

these things as a pre-cursor to work. But they stressed that, in order to be able to sustain work, they need in-work support, such as supported employment with job coaches and tutors, which is explored further in section 6. They advocated in particular the Individual Placement Support model, discussed further in section 6, on the basis that getting someone into work, and supporting them to sustain that work, 'stabilises their whole life'.

5. Support to move toward re-engagement with education, employment or training

- 5.1. Having engaged a young person, they need to be supported to progress, to move closer to re-engagement with EET. The literature reviewed identifies a number of characteristics of effective support to help build motivation, capabilities and/or access to opportunities (and therefore change their behaviours), discussed in this section.

A holistic, person-centred approach

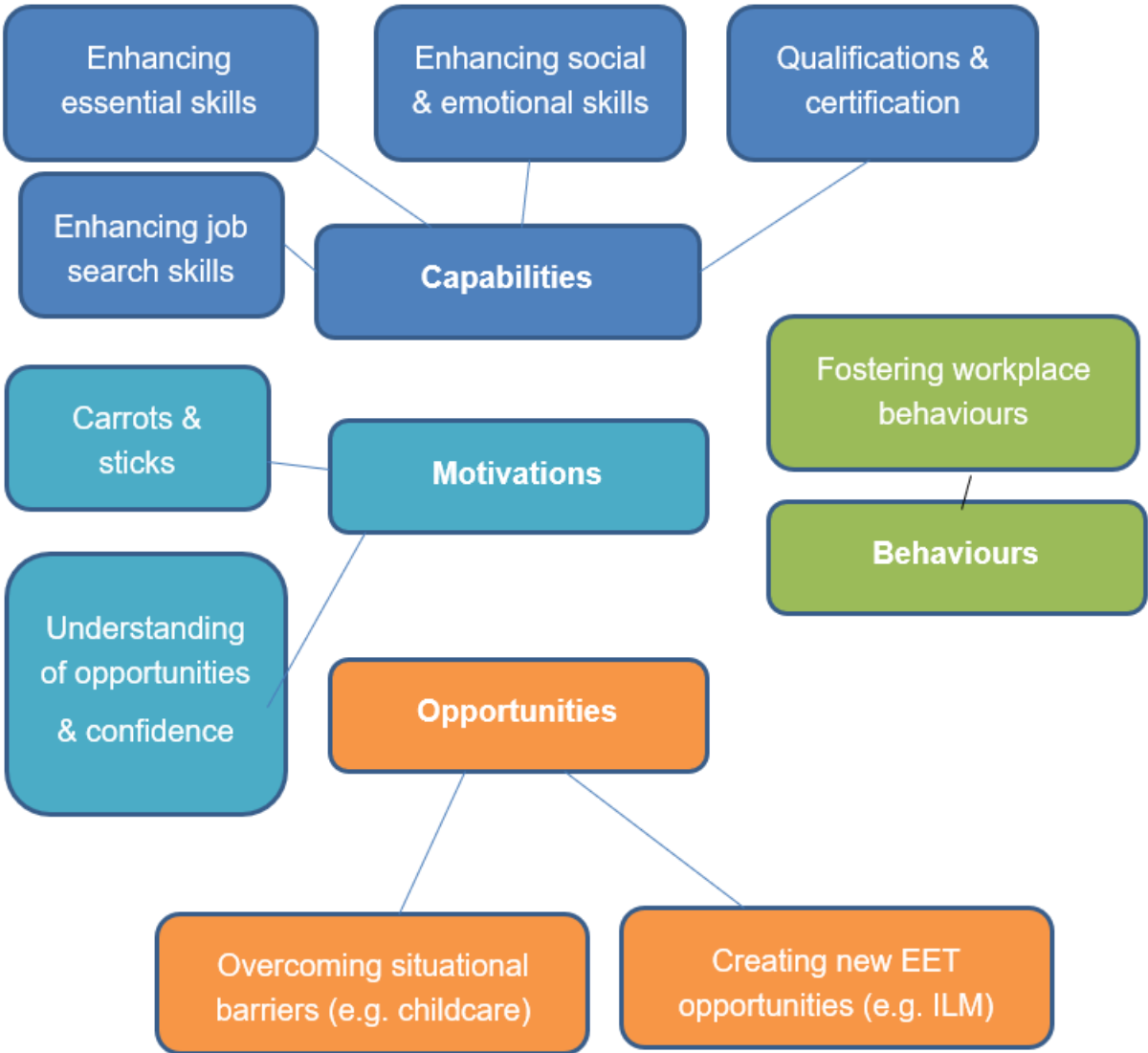
- 5.2. As section 3 illustrates, young people's support needs are diverse. Some young people require only short 'sharp interventions' to address specific employment needs, for instance a work related certification such as a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card (DWP, 2022) while others have more complex, multi-faceted needs. Therefore, as figure 5.1 illustrates, the effectiveness of what are variously described as 'multi-component' 'wraparound' or 'comprehensive' interventions, that can enhance young people's capabilities, motivation, access to opportunities and/or change their behaviours, are consistently identified as important (see (SEU, 2005; Mawn et al., 2017; ILO, 2017) and seen as more effective than isolated or disconnected interventions (ILO, 2017)³⁵. This typically involves programmes that integrate:

- pastoral (emotional and social) support, such as encouragement and confidence building (to maintain motivation in the face of repeated knock backs from employers);
- practical support, such as Information Advice and Guidance (IAG), help with curricula vitae (CVs) and job searching; and
- brokerage to opportunities (including access to training and work experience, discussed below) and, where needed, other support services (for example, health, housing or drug and alcohol misuse services).

³⁵ For example, it is identified that training undertaken in isolation from help with job search and presentation may not help participants to find work (LDA, 2006).

5.3. A flexible, person-centred approach is also consistently identified as important in ensuring that support is ‘tailored to the needs of the individual’ (as needs vary considerably), maximising the cost-effectiveness of interventions (DfE, 2010; Green and Taylor, 2020; LDA, 2020; UK Government, 2022). Within Wales this is a common feature of employment support programmes like CW+ and Working Wales (Welsh Government, 2023b; Welsh Government, 2020).

Figure 5.1. The components of support



Source: Figure created for the review

5.4. Nevertheless, a common finding is that flexible, person-centred approaches are not universally effective. The most disadvantaged young people are least likely to achieve positive outcomes in terms of re-engagement with EET (Mawn et al., 2017), although they may benefit in other ways (such as increases in self-confidence) (Welsh Government, Forthcoming).

The role played by trusted adults

5.5. The trusted adult role played by professionals such as ‘key workers’, ‘advisors’, ‘mentors’ or similar, are consistently identified as important; they can:

- enable (and inform) the tailoring of support, by ensuring that a young person’s aspirations, capabilities, access to opportunities, motivation and behaviours are understood;
- give pastoral (emotional and social) support, such as encouragement to help change attitudes and behaviour and help give young people the confidence to take risks, because they know there is someone ‘on their side’ (as one interviewee put it), helping champion their interests, and putting them first;
- directly provide practical support, such as support with action planning³⁶, developing CVs, registering on job recruitment sites and navigating increasingly complex job application processes; and
- link individuals to support, sometimes described as ‘brokerage’ or ‘coordination’ (Martin and Grubb, 2001; DfE, 2010; ILO, 2017; DfE, 2020; UK Government, 2022).

5.6. As one study identifies, trusted adults performing these different roles help ‘young people get the most out of their participation on the programme’ (DfE, 2010). In a similar vein, Green and Taylor (2020) identify how trusted adults support progression by helping young people to recognise ‘the skills and experiences they have gained through volunteering and in understanding how they can utilise these skills to progress in education or employment’. The differing roles they can play, depending on the ‘individual’s position on the job seeking journey’, can include youth work,

³⁶ As one study identifies, ‘effective advisory support often focuses on breaking down actions into a series of small achievable steps in order that participants and their advisers can observe the changes being achieved – ‘action planning’ (IES, 2020, p.8).

careers advice (IAG), and a lead professional role (SEU, 2005; Green and Taylor, 2020).

- 5.7. As noted, within Wales trusted adults, such as youth workers, form a key part of the YEPF support offer for 16-18 year olds. However, their role in supporting those aged 19-24 to re-engage with EET, appears to be less clearly defined or funded, since the YEPF was refocused upon 11-18 year olds.³⁷ Staff within programmes such as CfW+ can also play the role of trusted adult, but they only support those who have already engaged with a programme like CfW+.

The Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion pilots: the role of trusted adults

The Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion programme was established in 2007 in support of adults who 'lived chaotic or isolated lives and were hard to reach', such as some sex workers, rough sleepers, street drinkers with mental health difficulties and victims of domestic abuse. They were people struggling with, or unable to recover from, traumatic events, and who could not and/or would not access help from friends, family or services.

The evaluation identified that 'the pilot workers often worked as consistent, trusted adults' who helped 'the most chaotic and isolated...navigate the local services and move between transition points in their lives (such as moving into more secure accommodation). The pilots were effective in improving adults' situations and in particular their health, and 'the three [of the twelve] projects that delivered interventions to address worklessness significantly influenced the employment status of their clients'.

Source: DCLG, 2011

- 5.8. The importance of someone whom young people believe has their best interests at heart, whom they can trust and rely on, is identified as of critical importance (SEU, 2005). As one interviewee put it, the role is 'about time, patience, fun, boundaries,

³⁷ For example, discussion of employment in the current Youth Work Strategy for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019) is focused upon their role in the YEPF, which, when the strategy was developed, focused upon young people aged 16-25 (rather than 11-18).

skill, the relationship [the young person has] with the worker'. It is seen as particularly important where, for example, young people's parents are unable to fulfil this role or are themselves a barrier to a young person's re-engagement with EET. The trusted adult role is typically also an integral part of person-centred approaches which, as outlined in section 4, help humanise services and young people's experiences of them.

- 5.9. The role of trusted adult is not unique to EET support services (and can, for example, be found in a range of education and youth service settings) but what should distinguish the role in this context is a focus upon employment. As one interviewee observed, without this, it risks becoming a more generic support worker role, and the opportunity to, when appropriate, encourage and challenge a young person to move toward re-engagement with EET and potentially take risks and difficult decisions, will be lost. Equally, it requires them to take a holistic approach (rather than a narrow focus upon EET), that includes, for example, a focus upon young people's mental health and well-being, their housing and their behaviours because, as the review's first report outlines, these can all impact upon young people's prospects for re-engaging with EET.
- 5.10. Studies consistently highlight the importance of the quality and consistency of support provided by trusted adults, including their:
- knowledge of local support services and employment opportunities ³⁸;
 - empathy and social and emotional skills, including the ability to foster rapport, trust and respect with young people and also, importantly, with other services and professionals (so they can play the role of 'lead professional ³⁹'); and
 - reliability (doing what they said they would) and stability (by minimising staff turnover) (Green and Taylor, 2020).

³⁸ In this context, the evaluation of the OoWS identified that "Some peer mentors did not feel equipped or confident to offer employability related support, and therefore an employment specialist role can add distinctive value' (Welsh Government, 2023c).

³⁹ A lead professional helping broker access to and join up or co-ordinate the response of and support from different services involved in supporting a young person (SEU, 2005).

Enhancing young people's capabilities

5.11. Enhancing young people's capabilities to seek and take up EET opportunities is consistently identified as important and necessary to aid re-engagement with EET. This can include education, training, volunteering and more informal learning, to:

- strengthen essential skills (including English language skills, where required);
- strengthen social and emotional skills;
- develop appropriate workplace behaviours ⁴⁰;
- acquire work related certification (for example, CSCS or Security Industry Authority (SIA) cards), technical/vocational skills and/or qualifications (for example, food hygiene); and
- enhance job search and application skills (for example, improving CVs and interview preparation) (LDA, 2006; ILO, 2017; Green and Taylor, 2020; UK Government, 2022).

Education, training and employer engagement

5.12. Education and training is identified as a key means to enhance young people's capabilities (see IES, 2020) and is a common component of EET services, such as CfW+ and Jobs Growth Wales Plus (JGW+). Although not specific to young people, the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth identifies that 'training has a positive impact on participants' employment or earnings in around half of the evaluations reviewed' (WWCLEG, 2016), although other studies also identify that the impact of formal training in terms of both job entry and also retention is often only measurable after several years have passed (Martin and Grubb, 2001; LDA, 2006).

5.13. In assessing impact it is also important to note that young people, and particularly those with negative experiences of school, can be reluctant to engage, particularly in structured classroom-based provision (UK Government, 2022). While even those who may have done well at school but who have struggled to make the transition to post-16 education, training or employment, and/or whose education was disrupted by the pandemic, may lack confidence in re-engaging with education or training even

⁴⁰ Disadvantaged young people with limited or no work experience often need help. This includes 'dressing appropriately, personal hygiene, how to interact with colleagues and supervisors and understanding that receiving, and following instructions is a normal part of working life and not a sign that the individual receiving the orders has been singled out' (LDA, 2006).

when, for example, it is more informal (and not classroom based). Moreover, some young people who would benefit from education or training (in enhancing their prospects of progression) may opt to try to find employment first rather than potentially delaying their re-entry to the labour market by taking up education or training or work placements (discussed below) (Welsh Government, 2023b).

- 5.14. There is little evidence in the literature review of the value of training for the sake of training and instead, the literature reviewed identifies the importance of ensuring that the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired are those young people need to successfully re-engage with EET. This requires an understanding of both employer expectations, the skill gaps and the deficits that individual young people have, and their motivations (or interests) and capabilities⁴¹ (Martin and Grubb, 2001; LDA, 2006; Green and Taylor, 2020).
- 5.15. As Green and Taylor (2020) identify, ‘links with employers are fundamental to success in a job seeking journey – employers are the gatekeepers to jobs so it is important to understand their recruitment and selection procedures’. Particularly in relation to vocational or technical training, engagement with employers is consistently identified as important in ensuring the relevance of training, while matching training to labour market demands helps ensure training provides pathways to employment (and therefore also enhances access to opportunities) (Martin and Grubb, 2001; LDA, 2006; UK Government, 2022). Evidence from several programmes indicates that there is value in having specialist dedicated staff in employer engagement and involvement roles (Green and Taylor, 2020). This can include an ‘agency’ approach or an ‘individual’ approach with the former offering wider recruitment solutions for (usually) larger employers with good links to providers, and the latter focusing on individual brokerage, often for individuals facing the greatest challenges in the labour market (ibid.).

⁴¹ Failures to match the level of education or training with the capability of the young person (their skills and knowledge) can be damaging and may, for example, demotivate young people.

Work placements

- 5.16. Research identifies that ‘work placements can be helpful in providing insights into different working environments’ and, when integrated with training to ensure young people have the knowledge and skills required, ‘sends a valuable signal to employers about a candidate’s employability’ (Green and Taylor, 2020). Within Wales, work placements are a feature of programmes like JGW+ and CfW+. However, it is worth noting that the take up of work placements was lower than anticipated on CfW, in part as it appears that many participants opted for employment rather than training first (Welsh Government, 2023a).

Information, advice and guidance

- 5.17. IAG on job searching, application and employment opportunities (including matching people to jobs) are all important, and often amongst the least costly of interventions, but often neglected in evaluations (Martin and Grubb, 2001); it is noted that:

- ‘a lack of access to job market information, including employer recruitment channels, prevent long-term unemployed people in the UK from securing employment in improving/buoyant labour markets’ (Green and Taylor, 2020); and
- ‘the outlook of some jobseekers is localised which in turn leads them to restrict themselves to a smaller set of local job opportunities than exist in reality’ (meaning that their ‘subjective’ assessment of employment opportunities is more limited than a more ‘objective’ assessment would suggest) (SEU, 2005; Green and Taylor, 2020).

- 5.18. Within Wales, information, advice and guidance on job searching, application and employment opportunities, is a key part of Working Wales offer (Welsh Government 2022) and that of employment support programmes like CfW+ (Welsh Government, 2023a).

Enhancing access to opportunities

- 5.19. As well as increasing young people’s knowledge and understanding of EET opportunities, interventions can also seek to dismantle or help young people

overcome situational barriers such as caring responsibilities, and/or create new opportunities though, for example, subsidies for employers.

Childcare

5.20. While childcare can be an important barrier for some, particularly young women, the evidence of the cost-effectiveness of childcare support is mixed. The impact evaluation of Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE) (although not limited to 16 to 24 year olds) identified that it helped people who would not otherwise have done so, re-enter work⁴² (Welsh Government, 2022e). However, free or subsidised childcare may not change parents' behaviour, as many of those who benefit will already be using and paying for childcare (IFS, 2023). This is supported by the evaluation of the childcare offer in Wales (which is not limited to young people) , which, relying upon self-reported data for a survey of parents, identified, that 'just over half of parents surveyed in year five (52 per cent) noted that their employment situation would be the same or very similar to what it currently was even if they had not been able to access the Offer.' Equally, half felt that their employment situation would be different and they would, for example, be working fewer hours in the absence of the Offer⁴³ (Welsh Government, 2022f, p.41).

5.21. As well as being costly, childcare can be difficult to arrange, particularly when, for example, children of different ages require different provision, have additional needs, and /or childcare is required at atypical hours⁴⁴ (LDA, 2006). This is supported by the evaluation of PaCE, which identifies that:

'Availability or affordability issues were rarely the only childcare related barriers faced by parents. The barriers faced by PaCE participants were generally more nuanced and related to parents' poor understanding of the childcare 'market' and

⁴² The Impact evaluation estimates that 30 per cent more young people progressing into work than would otherwise have done in the absence of the programme (Welsh Government, 2022e).

⁴³ Over a third of respondents (37 per cent) noted that without the Offer they would be working fewer hours and a further 10 per cent said they would be in a job with fewer career progression opportunities. The same proportion, 10 per cent said they would not be working at all and a further nine per cent thought they would be working in a job with lower pay.

⁴⁴ It is also noted that formal child care can be difficult to arrange at short notice whilst informal childcare can break down (LDA, 2006).

of the support available to them in accessing childcare’ (Welsh Government, 2022e, p.53).

Homelessness

- 5.22. Homelessness is another key situational barrier for some young people and rates of unemployment amongst those who are homeless are much higher than the general population (CfHI, 2022). Although most people experiencing homelessness have worked in the past, and want to work, instability in young people’s lives can discourage and make it difficult for them to engage with support services and hampers their ability to sustain their engagement. Co-occurring difficulties, such as mental health problems and /or substance misuse can further diminish their capabilities and exacerbate the difficulties they face, while employers can be reluctant to recruit homeless young people, further reducing their access to opportunities. The differences in their capabilities mean that their motivations, access to opportunities and behaviours also differ markedly. (Green and Taylor, 2020; CfHI, 2022).
- 5.23. However, like most groups, homeless young people are diverse. Some will only require ‘light touch’ support to help them recover from a ‘homelessness crisis’ and engage with EET, while others will need ‘more specialist interventions’. While, in the literature reviewed, addressing this was seen as important, there were few examples of interventions specifically targeted at homelessness, other than the Transitional Space project (Green and Taylor, 2020) and the Individual Placement Support (IPS) model (see boxed text), which the Centre for Homelessness Impact, part of the What Works network, identifies has the best evidence of effectiveness (CfHI, 2022). One interviewee also identified it as effective practice.

Individual Placement and Support

IPS was first developed in the United States, to support adults with severe mental illness, and has since been adapted for other groups, including young people with mental health difficulties experiencing homelessness; its key principles include:

- ‘zero exclusions, with everyone who wants to work being supported regardless of their apparent distance to the labour market’;
 - ‘competitive employment as quickly as possible, aiming to obtain paid jobs in the community as quickly as one month after meeting for the initial vocational profile’;
- and
- ‘ongoing support for as long as needed, which includes individualised and integrated support for vocational, mental health and any other needs....[including] for people experiencing homelessness....an offer of settled, secure accommodation’.

Source: CfHI (2022); see also LWI (2019).

5.24. However, the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CfHI) also identifies that young people are more likely to enter precarious employment with low and/or variable pay and insecurity, than those aged 25 and over. This is a key concern, as this type of employment may be ‘insufficient to enable young people to leave homelessness behind’ and that a ‘significant proportion of those who gain employment [with the support of EET services] may struggle to sustain it or to improve their incomes significantly’ (CfHI, 2022, p.6).

Supported employment

5.25. Supported employment has been shown to be effective for those with mental health difficulties (Green and Taylor, 2020; Thompson et al., 2021) and it is argued, although not robustly evidenced, also effective for people with disabilities (Beyer and Robinson, 2009; LWI, 2019).

Engage to Change

The Engage to Change project aims to support young people aged 16 to 25 who have a learning difficulty, learning disability and/or autism, to achieve their full potential.

Interviewees described how, following a referral, a provider agency does an assessment and vocational profiling to identify an individual's capabilities, their aspirations, likes and preferences. This then informs a programme of support to meet the individual's needs; this focuses upon:

- preparing the young person, and building their capabilities through, for example, supported internships involving a host business and a college (where a young person enrolls on an independent living course and spends some time in college each week but is mostly in work), work preparation including 'shadow' work and training, such as accredited courses (e.g. food hygiene), and when a specific job is identified, a job coach identifies what is needed, then teaches the young person job tasks before gradually withdrawing, while maintaining contact; and
- increasing access to opportunities by identifying jobs and working with employers by, for example, providing disability awareness training, checking the job description is clear and appropriate and, in some cases, providing a six-month grant to employers, which can be used to cover wages, on the understanding that they will keep the young person on afterwards. Interviewees described how they aim for employers that can offer a range of opportunities, such as a hospital.
- providing in-work support through mentoring and the support of a job coach. If the young person is not taken on, they are referred back to the project.

Source: interviews (for the review)

5.26. Within Wales, the Jobs Growth Wales+ (JGW+) supported employment pilot aimed to improve outcomes for young people with a moderate to severe learning disability/difficulty and/or autism, by increasing the number who progress on to paid employment or apprenticeships. The evaluation of the pilot, which focused upon delivery and outcomes, but did not include an impact evaluation, identified that:

- referrals to the pilot were somewhat lower than anticipated;
- the programme flexibility and the breadth of activities and range of support provided by job coaches was effective in supporting learners;

- but that there were ‘mixed views on the effectiveness of training offered through the pilot’ (Welsh Government, 2023d).

Intermediate labour markets and wage subsidies

- 5.27. There is evidence that intermediate labour markets (ILMs)⁴⁵ can ‘address some of the shortcomings of public sector job creation while retaining the benefits of improving work skills, confidence and job readiness’ (IES, 2020). Within Wales, programmes like JGW+ offers employers a wage subsidy for young people aged 16-18 employed via the YPG.
- 5.28. Overall, the evidence of the effectiveness of wage subsidies is mixed (ILO, 2017; Welsh Government, 2020b). Some reviews argue that, particularly when integrated with other support for young people and active involvement of employers, they can be effective in supporting young people who would otherwise not be considered by employers, into employment. However, the evidence of additionality is modest, particularly if programmes are not targeted at those unlikely to take up employment without a subsidy (Welsh Government, 2020b; Green and Taylor, 2020; LDA, 2006; Martin and Grubb, 2001).

Motivating young people’s sustained engagement

- 5.29. Actions outlined above to strengthen young people’s capabilities, including their confidence and ability to effectively identify and apply for EET opportunities and actions to enhance their access to EET opportunities, are important in helping motivate young people to sustain their engagement with EET support services. Trusted adults can also play a key role in encouraging young people and more broadly, ‘carrots’, such as financial incentives and ‘sticks’, such as loss of benefits, can motivate young people to remain engaged. Agreements and action plans can also be valuable in helping shape young people’s behaviour (React, 2022) provided they are felt to be ‘fair’ (SEU, 2005). Nevertheless, as Sam and Karen’s story (in the boxed text below) illustrates, young people’s motivations are shaped by a range of

⁴⁵ ILMs create or subsidise temporary jobs specifically designed to support disadvantaged groups to acquire the capabilities and attitudes required to make and sustain a transition to unsubsidised employment.

factors, and even when, as in the case of Karen, a young person wants to work, and has accessed support, they can be held back.

What doesn't work well

5.30. The evidence review identifies some potential risks or challenges; for example:

- 'the limited UK evidence suggests that labour market programmes are less effective for people of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic origins than they are for the white population'. It is unclear why this is the case, although it may reflect differences in the type of provision accessed, linguistic barriers (for migrants and refugees) and/or discrimination (LDA, 2006);
- the evidence of the effectiveness of intervention to support long-term sick and disabled people is much more limited (LDA, 2006); and
- the most disadvantaged young people are often the hardest to help (for example, due to the scarring effects and correlation of different factors). They often require comprehensive support over a lengthy period (ILO, 2017; Martin and Grubb, 2001).

5.31. Some of the complexities and challenges are illustrated by Sam and Karen's stories, outlined on the next page. Their motivation to seek work was shaped by alternatives, such as welfare benefits in the case of Sam, and what was felt to be the negative influence of a partner, in the case of Karen. These proved difficult for the project to counter. Both Sam and Karen were also held back by limits in their capabilities, linked to experiences of care in the case of Sam and an impairment in the case of Karen.

Sam and Karen's stories

Sam (not his real name) is in his 20s. He has a flat, lives with Karen (not her real name), his girlfriend, has problems with his mental health and is NEET. Sam has

had a difficult life. He grew up in foster care and considers himself a 'victim', deserving of support and sympathy. As a care leaver he has always had a lot of support, which means he is used to people doing things for him. He has had one job since leaving school: he worked one shift at a fast food restaurant which he quit, citing unfair treatment by his manager.

Both Sam and Karen approached the project for help finding work, through Facebook. Sam said he was looking for work and was described as 'half-heartedly' taking up the project's offer of help to develop his CV and work on job and interview skills and travel costs. He was reported to have said that he 'was not interested' in other types of support such as volunteering placements. Project workers described how he did not seem to understand boundaries and would phone for support in the evenings, with problems that were not related to employment (for example, 'I really need some baccy' [tobacco]). They felt he was 'looking for a friend', rather than support to find work. In contrast, Karen was reported to be very keen to find work, but has a neurodevelopmental condition, and was held back by Sam, who stopped Karen doing online courses by constantly using their devices, and telling her she can't do it this week, as 'we've got stuff planned'. Those working with Sam feel he is 'dragging Karen down' and suspect that he may be jealous and/or fearful of Karen leaving him. It later emerged that while engaging with the project, Sam had also been pursuing a claim for Personal Independence Payments. As soon as this was granted, he was reported to have immediately stopped looking for work and this led to Karen stopping as well.

Source: interviewees for the review (who described young people they had supported)

What else might work

Working with, expanding and changing young people's social networks

- 5.32. Peers and parents typically 'remain influential well into adulthood' and can 'reinforce positive or negative patterns of thinking and behaviour' (SEU, 2005). As outlined in section 4, peers can normalise behaviours, such as drug or alcohol misuse or

gaming, which can demotivate people and make sustaining engagement with EET support services more difficult. Supporting young people to form new social networks with other young people engaged with EET support services may help mitigate this. Given their pivotal role, there may also be opportunities to work with and support parents to help motivate young people to sustain their engagement with EET support services. In some cases, by providing a home, emotional and financial support to young people who are stuck or regressing, parents may be considered to be 'enabling' young people to remain NEET, rather than actively encouraging them to engage with either EET or EET support services.

- 5.33. Research has identified that some Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities' social networks are 'like with like'. Therefore, while they can help people access employment, they may be limited to low-paid jobs which rely upon 'informal recruitment processes' (JRF, 2013). Interviewees observed that social networks could also be limited by social deprivation which meant that young people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities were less likely to participate in social activities such as sports clubs. Therefore, they argued for expanding social networks enhancing access to support and information.

Working with employers

- 5.34. Bridging the gap between employers' expectations of young people and young people's understanding of what is expected of them may be effective. The existence of a mismatch between employers' expectations of young people and young people's understanding of what is expected of them is underlined in Rudiger (2013) (cited in Green and Taylor, 2020). One interviewee argued that paid work placements, which offered an employer a 'free worker to test out' could be valuable in building employers' confidence in a young person's employability. They reported that this was particularly valuable for small employers who could not afford to take risks.

Aligning aspirations, capabilities and opportunities

- 5.35. There can be a mismatch between some young people's aspirations and their capabilities and/or access to employment opportunities; as Williamson observes:

'Young people who are 'NEET' may, regrettably, have both inflated aspirations and an inappropriate constellation of skills, attitudes and qualifications that do not 'square' with the demands of the local labour market' (Williamson, 2010, p .9).

- 5.36. In response, IAG, if sensitively and effectively delivered may have a role to play in better aligning young people's aspirations with their capabilities and their access to opportunities (NFER, 2012).

Developing informal learning opportunities

- 5.37. Informal learning opportunities may be valuable, particularly if they offer greater flexibility than more formal provision (for example, in terms of start dates) without sacrificing quality (for example, underpinned by effective initial assessments of need to match learners to appropriate provision and support). Informal learning could provide IAG, pastoral support and quality learning experiences that build the capabilities that employers' demand and recognise. It may be more attractive to those with negative experiences of formal education (such as school) but does not of itself address the other barriers they may face (e.g. weak essential skills, mental ill-health and instability, which can hold them back) (NFER, 2012).

Improving post-16 educational provision for young people with ALN

- 5.38. One interviewee identified weakness in post-16 educational provision for young people with ALN. They argued that, for example, pre-vocational courses did not always adequately prepare young people to progress to mainstream further education provision and that planning for this transition could be poor. They also argued that there is a gap for intelligent young people who are neurodiverse, who could access mainstream provision if appropriate adjustments were made but were 'stuck' in units offering a low level of education. They suggested that there is a need for provision for young people who are between a special school and a neurotypical provision. Within Wales, the ALN transformation programme, aims to enhance support for young people (with its focus upon 0-25 year olds), but the impact upon post 16 provision is not yet clear.

Addressing situational barriers

- 5.39. Travel training, which is generally aimed at young people with ALN or disabilities, and which aims to ensure they have confidence and skills to travel independently on buses, trains and walking routes, may potentially benefit wider groups who lack experience of and confidence in using public transport.
- 5.40. Interviewees also observed that access to devices and good internet connections vary from area to area across Wales, and addressing this may be necessary, even if not sufficient to support young people's re-engagement with EET.

Focus upon the psychological and the practical

- 5.41. Given the rise in mental ill-health discussed in the review's first report, access to support to help enhance young people's confidence and reduce their distress is likely to be important (Mawn et al., 2017). One interviewee observed that young people with mental health issues 'can take a very long time to support' and 'often there isn't anywhere to refer them forward when they aren't ready for independent living'. They argued that the system needs an overhaul and something like the Extra Care for Older People, but for young people, is needed, a place of quality that supports young people to be more independent.
- 5.42. Interviewees also observed that many young people have experienced trauma, which is consistent with the findings outlined in this review's first report (Welsh Government, 2024). In response, one described how they had adopted the Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE) approach to working. The aim was to ensure that young people became more confident and more resilient and better able to cope with difficult circumstances, cope with their emotions, trust people and be able to forge healthy relationships with others.

Psychologically Informed Environments

As one interviewee described, psychologically informed environments (PIE) are services that are designed and delivered in a way that takes into account the emotional and psychological needs of the individuals using them and working in them. Any service working with vulnerable people can become a PIE and a wide range of homelessness services have adopted the model. Examples of features

of a PIE are psychological awareness, staff training and support, and a learning approach.

‘The aim of a PIE is to improve the psychological and emotional well-being of people accessing, or working in, the service. It looks at the impact of trauma and encourages reflective practice. It supports the encouragement of a non-threatening workspace, kind language, develops a sympathetic understanding of young people, the basics really. That you should persevere, not reject the young person, set boundaries and rules. We never have enough resource to do things properly’. The model is based on the ACEs/trauma informed model.

Source: interviews (for the review)

- 5.43.** Interviewees (for the review) also observed that many young people had unmet basic needs and, for example, needed a home, food and clothing, which is consistent with the findings outlined in this review’s first report (Welsh Government, 2024).

Building EET support staff confidence and capabilities in working with young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities

- 5.44. Interviewees from EYST argued that, although there is a lot of support available, many people in EET support services lack confidence or do not know how to work with Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities; therefore they argued that:
- there is a need to train support workers so they are not afraid to work with Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Interviewees described how often EET support services refer people back to EYST when they themselves could help but they are afraid of saying the wrong thing. They argued that this training needs to be ongoing and recognise that different groups have different barriers; and
 - there needs to be a more open conversation about what people are worried about; why they are uncomfortable working with Black, Asian and minority ethnic young people.

Developing more long-term support options

- 5.45. Interviewees observed that some young people will need long term sustained support to tackle multiple issues, such as homelessness, mental health difficulties and drug and alcohol misuse, if they are to get to a position where they can re-engage and sustain their engagement with EET. This type of approach suggests a continuum of support, whereas support needs increase, the number of young people who need this extra support decreases.
- 5.46. Providing long term and sometime intensive support can be difficult for programmes which are driven by targets linked to outcomes, because outcomes for these young people cannot be achieved for a long time, even years in some cases and also, the time and resource required to support these young people inevitably limits the time and resource that can be spent supporting others. The staff skills and autonomy required to work with those with greatest needs is also likely to be greater; for example, workers need to be able to:
- cultivate a relationship of trust with the young person so they can better understand the young person's thinking, behaviour and aspirations, give IAG and, where appropriate, challenge, that is accepted by the young person;
 - work with a range of partners, such as housing, drug and alcohol misuse and mental health services, to help ensure that a young person's wider needs are met, and that support is co-ordinated, timely, taken up by the young person and delivered reliably; and
 - assess if a young person is sufficiently motivated, or at least open to being motivated to, for example, make difficult choices, such as:
 - potentially breaking with peer groups (where, for example, their attitudes and behaviours, such as drug or alcohol abuse, are holding a young person back);
 - changing their behaviour, such as stopping or moderating drug and alcohol misuse; and
 - confronting their fears (such as anxieties around re-engaging with education or training if they have had negative experiences of education in school, or with interacting with others or leaving the community they know and feel comfortable in) and exposing themselves to the risk of failure (where, for

example, young people feel it is better not to try, rather than try and risk failing).

- 5.47. The last point is an important one. Not every young person will be willing (motivated) or ready to move forward (not having the capability and/or opportunity), meaningfully engage with support and make these potentially difficult choices. The experience of the OoWS programme may be instructive here, as almost half of those recruited (including those aged 25 and over who make up three quarters of the programme) left the programme early, as they ‘had high-level needs and were experiencing complex mental health problems and were, therefore, far-off from entering employment’ (Welsh Government, 2023c, p.5). However, as the evaluation notes ‘This was likely related to the conditions of the pandemic whereby people were facing significant challenges and services were less accessible than usual’ (ibid.).
- 5.48. Deciding if a young person is ready or not will require staff with not only the skill, but also the confidence that support will be there in the future, if a young person is not yet ready to re-engage. Otherwise, they will, in effect, be writing the young person off. Therefore, it is vital that policy (and practice) provides ‘the right bridges at the moments when they [young people] are motivated to cross them’ (Williamson, 2010, p.17).

Systems change and leadership

- 5.49. As one interviewee observed, much of their work involved organising and liaising with partner agencies and, when necessary, challenging them and holding them to account. This was reported to be important to ensure the quality of opportunities was acceptable and to make sure that things that were promised happened. The importance of collaboration and partnership working is explored further in section 9, and the boxed text considers the potential role of systems leadership.

Systems Leadership

EET support for young people forms part of a wider system which also includes, for example, health and social care services, post-16 education and training providers and employers. The more complex a young person's needs the more likely it is that other services will be involved and the more complex the system they have to navigate. As outlined above, trusted adults can play a crucial role in helping young people to navigate the system.

However, as well as helping young people to navigate the system, trusted adults can potentially change the wider system through collaboration with partners. This type of approach pushes collaboration beyond a focus upon narrow organisational interests and targets and an existing model of partnership working, such as establishing mechanisms to refer young people between partners, to actively working across organisational boundaries to change and challenge the system.

Systems leadership should be distributed (rather than considered the property of an individual) and could range from an individual advisor in an EET support service ensuring that a young person judged at risk of dropping out was flagged to student support services as at risk, to work at local authority or regional level through, for example, a Public Service Board, Regional Skills Partnership or Regional Partnership Board, to address systemic weaknesses in housing, post-16 education and training provision, or mental health services for young people.

Adapted from Bolden, n.d.

6. Sustainability and progression in education, employment or training

What works

- 6.1. Two broad approaches to employment support are identified:
- 'human capital centred', with a focus upon enhancing young people capabilities through, for example, education and training, to better prepare young people for employment; and
 - 'work first', with a focus upon getting young people into work as fast as possible through, for example, a focus upon job search assistance (IES, 2020; DWP, 2014).
- 6.2. Both can be effective, although the former may lead to more sustainable job outcomes (IES, 2020) and is the focus of the remainder of this section.

Sustaining and progressing in education, employment and training

- 6.3. As figure 6.1 illustrates, reviews suggest that retention and progression in EET are helped by a focus upon:
- education, employment and training opportunities and, for example, the quality of the initial job (in terms of stability, pay and hours) and job matching (given young people's capabilities and aspirations), which is seen as particularly important for groups such as disabled young people, to ensure the role is suitable and reasonable adjustments are made and there is a good 'fit' between the role and the employee⁴⁶; and
 - young people's capabilities, including their skills, resilience⁴⁷ and access to support to resolve problems in the workplace (for example, relationships with colleagues) and outside (for example, childcare breakdowns) (LDA, 2006; Green and Taylor, 2020).

⁴⁶ This could include, for example, IAG and work placements, so that young people can experience different options before choosing (IES, 2014).

⁴⁷ For example, having a financial cushion to cope with crises (for example, transport or childcare problems) (LDA, 2006; Green and Taylor, 2020).

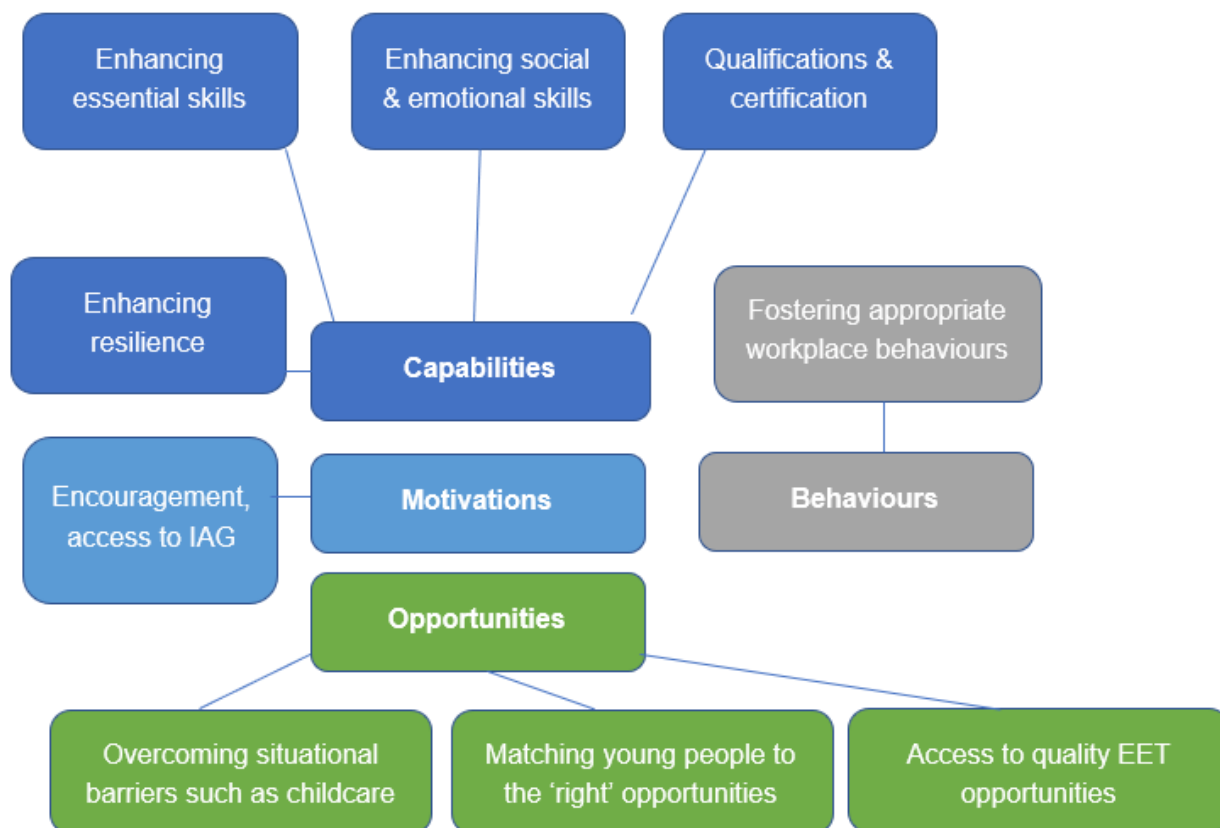
A focus on both the above can help motivate young people to keep going in the face of adversity, and this can be strengthened through support and encouragement and IAG from, for example, a workplace mentor.

Job Matching

Steve (not his real name) is in his 20s and suffers from anxiety. He left school 'without anything' but dreams of becoming a professional footballer. Given his passion for sports, the Green Light project helped him get a job with a local sports centre. Steve was described as having a huge amount of energy, a passion for sports and was described as a 'natural' coach who is great with young people. However, he had never been in a work environment before, and needed support and guidance on how to behave. He is really enjoying his new role, has been promoted, and his self-confidence has grown.

Source: interviews (for the review)

Figure 6.1. Sustaining and supporting progression in EET



Source: Figure created for the review

6.4. Research suggests that in-work support may be more important:

- where initial entry is into 'poor work' with fewer progression opportunities. In this case, in-work support can help young people develop the skills, behaviours and attitudes employers demand and help employers understand how young people's needs can best be met, thus helping reduce the risk of young people getting trapped in poor work (Green and Taylor, 2020; IES, 2020); and/or
- for groups at greater risk of encountering problems either in work or outside work, which could cause them to disengage, such as disabled people, carers, ethnic minorities, lone parents and people involved in substance misuse (Green and Taylor, 2020).

- 6.5. However, research identifies that there ‘is no consistent evidence on which elements of in-work support are more effective’ (WWCLEG, 2019; IES, 2020).

In-Work Support

In-work support is intended to help young people sustain employment and to progress in employment; it typically includes:

- IAG around, for example, training opportunities and applying for new roles (which can aid progression); and
- financial support for the individual, such as help with transport or childcare and/or the employer (such as wage subsidies).

The What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth identifies that:

- ‘in-work support can increase employment and wages, but effects vary both across and within programme and are not always positive’ and, ‘of those programmes that are effective, some report stronger effects for more disadvantaged groups’.
- financial incentives are key for sustained effects and may be more effective when combined with employment support services but may also be less important than effective job matching’.
- but ‘in-work support is not consistently cost effective, even when the programme outcomes are positive’.

Adapted from WWCLEG, in work progression toolkit

What else might work

Support for those re-engaging with education or training

- 6.6. Outcomes for post-16 learners reflect demographic characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, disability, gender, and place (OFS, 2023).

Interviewees observed that support for those entering education or training is likely to be as important as support for those entering employment. As well as preparing young people for education and training and providers’ expectations, there may be a need for more reactive support if, for example, a young person encounters problems

in their personal life, such as family illness, bereavement or legal problems which, as Cath's story illustrates, if not managed, may mean people miss and potentially leave work. As one interviewee stressed, 'don't cut off support until it is no longer needed'. They argued that youthwork is really important alongside employment support because 'you build up a relationship' and it can be sustained throughout training and employment.

Navigating the challenges of post-16 education

Cath (not her real name) is in her twenties, struggled academically and socially at school and left with no friends, other than those she interacted with online. She has a suspected, but undiagnosed, neurodevelopmental condition, poor social skills and, after leaving school, retreated to her bedroom, playing games online and caring for her mother. This pattern of behaviour became entrenched during the COVID-19 lockdowns, her comfort zone shrank further and her mental health deteriorated.

A project worker recognised Cath's talents and suggested and encouraged her to consider going to university. The project accompanied her to university open days and supported her through the application process and accessing financial support (described by one worker as 'hand holding').

On Cath's first day at university, Cath was kicked out of her house by her mother. A project worker helped Cath gather her clothes and belongings and accompanied her to university, where (unlike Cath) most students were with their families. The worker helped Cath, who had never lived on her own before, buy bedding, toiletries and pots and pans.

Cath has struggled at times like Christmas when, unlike most students, she cannot go home. She also at times feels she is 'above' some of the university work (given what she has already learnt and taught herself to do) and had to be told firmly by a project support worker that lectures are not optional, and you 'can't just not go'.

Source: interviews (for the review, in which staff described young people they had supported)

- 6.7. Within Wales, as outlined above, 11 to 16 year olds at risk of disengaging, or 16-18 year olds who are NEET, should be identified through YEPF processes. Lead workers, often drawn from the youth service, are assigned to young people most at risk of disengaging or who are NEET and with significant barriers to engagement. Lead workers act as trusted adults, providing continuity of support and contact for the most at-risk young people to remain in, or to enter EET. However:
- arrangements for identifying those aged 19-24 who are at risk of disengaging, depend upon individual employers, or education or training providers; and
 - arrangements for identifying those aged 19-24 who have disengaged (and who are NEET), appear less developed and more dependent upon young people actively seeking support themselves, or for example, being referred by a service like JCP.
- 6.8. Interviewees also reported that young people in work-based learning (WBL), such as trade apprenticeships, which required them to find placements, disadvantaged those without strong social connections in their chosen trade. It was reported that this can be a problem for young people of all ethnicities, but it was reported that young people from Black Asian and minority ethnic communities were particularly disadvantaged and that 'colleges do not help'.

Support for those with neurodevelopmental conditions

- 6.9. Interviewees said that in-work support could be particularly important for some young people with neurodevelopmental conditions⁴⁸. They argued that there should be a national job coaching/mentoring service that can help young people with learning disability and/or autism into work, can help them to do the job (for example, through onsite training) and be available to help people cope with change and sustain their role over time; it is reported (by interviewees for the review) that:
- the model also works to get people back into education;
 - this approach, working with young people holistically, helping them to live their lives as well as cope with EET, can work for all young people with multiple or

⁴⁸ As the review's first report outlines, rates of employment amongst young people in these groups are very low (DWP, 2022).

complex needs, such as mental health difficulties, drug or alcohol abuse and/or homelessness; and

- these high quality, intensive interventions are more costly but there are lifetime savings if people do not need social services interventions across their lives.

6.10. As noted, within Wales there have been projects like Engage to Change and the Jobs Growth Wales+ (JGW+) supported employment pilot which aimed to improve outcomes for young people with a moderate to severe learning disability/difficulty and/or autism, but both have now finished.

7. Prevention

- 7.1. The focus of this review is upon re-engaging young people who have become disengaged from education, employment and training (and are therefore NEET). However, it is important to note that ‘early intervention’ programmes aim to ‘stem the flow’ to becoming NEET by improving the experience of compulsory education (IES, 2020) and by, for example, targeting specific transition points, such as Key Stage 4 at-16 and at-18, can support diversion from NEET and improve attainment (LWI, 2020). This is important because, as Cedefop identifies, ‘compared to prevention, compensation measures are more complex to design and implement. The target group is more heavily disengaged and the gaps to compensate are wider’ (cited in IES, 2020).
- 7.2. Similarly, Martin and Grubb identify that ‘the evidence from Canadian and US evaluations suggests that the highest pay offs for disadvantaged youths come from early and sustained interventions’. They go on to argue that ‘it cannot be over-emphasised that if young people leave the schooling system without qualifications and a good ground in the 3Rs, it is well-nigh impossible for labour market programmes to overcome these handicaps later on’ (Martin and Grubb, 2001).
- 7.3. This overstates the case for prevention and early intervention. There are examples of programmes such as CfW and CfW+ that for example, have helped young people, exposed to many of the risk factors outlined in this report, succeed against the odds (Welsh Government, Forthcoming). Moreover, ensuring that every young person leaves school with essential skills and good qualifications is a longstanding policy goal that successive governments have struggled to achieve (see e.g. OECD, 2017). Nevertheless, it forcefully makes the point that delaying intervention generally means problems get more entrenched and more costly and more difficult to overcome. A focus upon prevention is also an integral part of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

8. Cross-cutting issues

Effective delivery

- 8.1. The evidence is clear that it is not only what is done, but how well it is done (or implemented) that matters (ILO, 2017). The evaluation of CfW and CfW+, for example, has identified that, while on paper the support offered by JCP work coaches (such as encouragement, advice on job searches, access to training and help to develop CVs) was very similar to that offered by CfW and CfW+ advisors and mentors, the support offered by CfW and CfW+ advisors was qualitatively different, as they had much more time and often a very different relationship with participants, compared to JCP work coaches (Welsh Government, 2023b). This was reported by programme staff (Welsh Government, 2023b) and participants (Welsh Government, Forthcoming) to be a much more effective model.
- 8.2. Key factors identified by the studies associated with effective delivery include:
- effective use of external and internal data (for example, to identify young people who would benefit from the support offered, match them to appropriate provision and monitor performance);
 - developing partnerships to encourage referrals and support delivery;
 - ensuring adequate resourcing; and
 - intelligent use of performance management to ensure, for example, that targets do not encourage ‘creaming and parking’ (focusing upon those easier to reach and help) or discourage providers from taking the time to support young people who need more intensive and long-term interventions (UK Government, 2022; NAO, 2015).
- 8.3. It is also observed in one study, that successfully scaling up small scale programmes can be difficult (Martin and Grubb, 2001). This likely reflects the difficulties in scaling up person-centred approaches and in preserving strong links to local employers and partners. In a similar vein, it was also reported by interviewees that ‘mainstreaming specialist support’ can be challenging. The example was given of the Real Opportunities programme which ended because it was reported that WEFO said that the support model was understood and could now be delivered by mainstream

support services. However, it was reported (by interviewees for this review) that this did not happen because mainstream services did not have the skills or the time to do what the Real Opportunities programme had done, leaving a large gap in provision for those with a learning disability or autism.

8.4. Interviewees identified other factors that hampered effective delivery, which included:

- short term project funding (described by one as ‘stop -start funding’) which was seen as a particular challenge for the third sector, and which could create cycles of pilot projects which did good work, but which were not then rolled out or mainstreamed;
- targets that could encourage providers to focus upon those easiest to reach and help, rather than those most in need;
- bureaucracy, rules and ways of working that work for the provider not the young person, such as inflexible start dates for courses which often only offer one or two opportunities to start each year; and
- the low status and pay of some EET support workers (see boxed text);
- a lack of skill and/or confidence in working with some groups of young people, such as those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and neurodiverse young people.

8.5. Exploring if there is an implementation gap, between the intent of policy and delivery in practice, and what the causes of this may be, could be a fruitful line of inquiry for the evaluation of the YPG.

Training and Paying Workers

Given the pivotal role that support workers play, particularly those who work with young people with more severe or complex needs, outlined in section 5, it is likely that the quality of EET support services cannot exceed the quality of its workers⁴⁹. The problem, as one interviewee from an EET support service observed, was that ‘we’re an industry that has low wages especially for support staff, those who work face-to-face every day with young people, skilled work that should be recognised’.

⁴⁹ As the McKinsey Report, How the world’s best performing education systems come out on top, famously observed, ‘the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers’.

They argued that there should be more resources to create a career pathway for this specific type of youth work, as they cover so many aspects: housing, support, care, health, mental health, therapeutic work, with an underpinning qualification that recognised the work, and appropriate pay and conditions.

Source: interviews (for the review)

Online and face to face delivery

- 8.6. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated moves to deliver support online. Evidence from evaluations of programme such as CfW and CfW+ (Welsh Government, 2023b) and the YPG National Conversation, suggests that ‘a combination of both face-to-face and online will be the best solution’, with the offer tailored to each individual’s preferences and needs (Welsh Government, 2023a, pp. 40-41).

Context

- 8.7. EET support programmes do not operate in a vacuum; for example, weakness in labour markets and/or post-16 education and training opportunities can undermine their effectiveness (NFER, 2012). Conversely, buoyant labour markets and attractive and accessible post-16 education and training opportunities can increase their effectiveness (by making it easier to re-engage young people who are NEET).

Joining up services and support

- 8.8. As section 4 illustrates, partners such as YEPF Engagement and Progression Coordinators (EPCs), JCP and Working Wales, can play a key role in identifying and introducing or referring young people who are, or are judged to be, at risk of becoming NEET, to EET support services.
- 8.9. As section 5 illustrates, comprehensive, multi-component programmes are seen as more effective, particularly for those with more complex barriers; these can include components or provision delivered by:
- the employment support programme itself (for example, by mentors or advisors); and

- partners, such as post-16 education and training providers, statutory services, such as mental health and housing services, and the third sector and employers (through volunteering and work placements).

8.10. The accessibility, attractiveness and quality of these different components is another key factor that enhances or constrains the effectiveness of EET support services; for example:

- failure of partners to identify and refer young people who are NEET and would benefit from support, can undermine engagement of young people by EET support services; and/or
- delays in accessing and/or weakness in post-16 education and training provision, can lead to young people disengaging from EET support services (as motivation can ebb and flow, and delays can mean the moment is lost or young people feel let down).

8.11. While dependent upon these other components, EET support services generally have little formal influence or authority over partners, unless provision is commissioned by EET support services themselves⁵⁰ and co-ordination of provision and partnership working is therefore important. Models such as co-location can also be 'effective in improving access to services, encouraging effective working relationships and supporting a shared understanding of roles' (Green and Taylor, 2020). As outlined in section 6, systems leadership may be important here. As outlined in section 5, working with and listening to partners, most notably employers, is also identified as critical in understanding their expectations and demands.

8.12. More broadly as the review's first report illustrates, the performance of public services in areas such as education and training, health, housing and transport, influences young people's capabilities (for example, as a result of their interactions with school

⁵⁰ For example, while referrals are common, there were few examples in the evidence reviewed of formal partnerships or integration of mental health and employment support services, other than the OoWS (Welsh Government, 2023c) and the Individual Placement Support (IPS) project, I CAN work, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Welsh Government in North Wales that provided integrated health and employability support to people with mild to moderate mental ill-health between 2019-2022.

and health services⁵¹), their access to opportunities, and their motivation to engage with EET support services and EET opportunities (where young people have had negative experiences of services and have become distrustful, suspicious or lacking in confidence) (SEU, 2005). Societal factors such as racism, discrimination and family breakdown can also impact upon young people's capabilities, access to opportunities and motivation. Action in areas such as education and training, family support, health, housing, public transport and community cohesion can therefore all be important in assisting EET support programmes (Egdell and McQuaid, 2014).

- 8.13. Looking specifically at mental health services, which are likely to have a key role, given the high incidence of mental health difficulties outlined in the review's first report, there is a large gap between demand and capacity (Public Health Wales, 2022). This is seen as perhaps the biggest challenge facing services today, and one which will hinder efforts to transform their structures, practice and/or culture (including enhancing partnership working with other services). Although the specific issues and scale may differ today, these are not fundamentally new challenges and, as the 2001 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) strategy *Everybody's Business* identified over 20 years ago, 'good joint working is the Holy Grail of all attempts to improve delivery of health, education and social services. It is easy to see its vital importance, but it has been very difficult to achieve' (NAFW, 2001, p.23).

Co-production

- 8.14. Co-production has been defined as an approach where 'professionals work in partnership with people who have lived experience, to develop solutions to challenges in public services and communities' (CPNfW, 2022); this can encompass:
- work with individual young people, exemplified through person-centred approaches, where professionals, such as advisors or mentors, work with young people to understand young people's capabilities, access to opportunities and motivations and help them realise their aspirations, so that the young

⁵¹ For example, the difficulties young people with mental health problems can experience transitioning from CAMHS to AMHS can lead to their disengagement from mental health services, and a worsening of their mental health difficulties (Welsh Government, 2020).

people are active agents of change rather than passive recipients of support⁵²; and

- work at a programme level to co-design, co-deliver, co-manage and co-evaluate them. As the boxed text illustrates, even if co-production is not fully developed, it can still bring important benefits.

Co-production in action

One of the organisations which contributed to the review, GISDA, described how they have a young people's board and also co-production projects focused upon specific areas; for example, they commissioned Co-production Wales to work with some of their young people to design the new shared space in the new building. They reported that they felt they supported young people involved in co-production well, that the things that young people identify get addressed quickly, so they have faith in the system and that it is a natural way for staff to work. However, they acknowledged that while there was effective practice in specific areas of work, they still needed to find a way to scale it up to the whole organisation.

Source: interviews (for the review)

8.15. As outlined in section 5, person-centred approaches are widely recommended in the literature, however the extent to which EET services embody the principles of co-production varies. Some provision, such as DWP programmes, for example the Work Programme, which were mandatory for some claimants, were not always experienced as empowering, and often focused upon organisational objectives (getting people into work as rapidly as possible) rather than an individual's own aspirations (such as finding a 'good' job) (DWP, 2014). In contrast, voluntary programmes like CfW and CfW+, with a more person-centred ethos, are more likely to be reported by young people to be based upon a genuine partnership between themselves and their advisor or mentor, and to exhibit more of the co-production values listed in the boxed text (Welsh Government, Forthcoming).

⁵² See for example, on the Capability Approach (Egdell and McQuaid (2014).

Co-Production Values

Co-production Wales identifies five key values (listed below). For an employment support programme like CfW or CfW+ this can mean, for example:

- **‘value people and build on their strengths’**, and focus upon what young people can do, rather than on weaknesses or difficulties, although it is important that the challenges a young person faces are not ignored;
- **‘focus on what matters for the people involved’**, such as young people’s aspirations, without accepting them uncritically as, for example, a misalignment between a young person’s aspirations and their capabilities and/or opportunities can hold them back;
- **‘build relationships of trust and shared power’**; young people in the evaluation (Welsh Government, forthcoming) described the importance of the voluntary nature of their relationship and that the advisors or mentors built trust as a result of their empathy and support, but also their reliability, in doing what they said they would do;
- **‘develop networks that operate across silos’** by, for example, working with partners, such as employers, education and training providers and public and voluntary sector services; and
- **‘enable people to be change makers’** which, as a voluntary programme, is crucial as, unless young people choose to re-engage and take steps to build their capabilities or access to opportunities, the programme cannot help them.

Adapted from: [Co-production Wales](#) and Welsh Government, Forthcoming.

- 8.16. Co-production at a programme level is also recommended, although less robustly evaluated; for example, Green and Taylor (2020, p.8) identify that ‘involving users in programme design helps shape interventions to better fit user needs while also providing beneficiaries with new experiences and helping build their confidence’. In a similar vein, as outlined in section 4, although research highlights the importance of understanding young people’s motivation, including how this is shaped by the perception of their capabilities and access to opportunities, this does not appear to

have consistently informed the design and/or delivery of employment support services (IES, 2020), which is a long standing challenge (SEU, 2005). Indeed, as one contributor to the workshops observed, 'I don't know what it's like coming from a broken home' so hearing from those with 'lived experience' was vital.

Co-production in action: Talent Match

Talent Match was a Big Lottery funded programme, to support 18-24 years olds who were NEET, by offering voluntary, personalised and flexible provision. The evaluation of the programme identified that young people's involvement included:

- 'youth-led governance and consultation groups which have a representative function on or influence on wider governance structures, such as partnership boards, steering groups and commissioning panels';
- 'individuals or groups of young people engaging young people in Talent Match and delivering peer support and training';
- 'helping to develop and/ or deliver services which respond to the needs of young people, either through advising service development or direct delivery'; and
- 'influencing policy and practice locally, giving feedback to employers, local authorities and Jobcentre Plus'.

The evaluation identified that 'involving young people helped improve service quality' and also benefitted young people who gained in 'skills and confidence'.

(Adapted from Green and Taylor, 2020, p.16)

8.17. The importance of understanding the subjective experience of young people is picked up in Williamson (2010), who observes that young people, such as 'Tommy':

'Will try to make sense of these 'opportunities' [such as the offer from EET support services] in the context of his subjective realities. The power in the messages from his local culture and community (however misguided and

misinformed) about what's the point of education, the exploitative nature of government training schemes, the need for a 'live for today' mentality (for the maintenance of psychological well-being), the suspicion of professionals, that volunteering is a cunning ploy to get you to work for nothing, the fact that there are other ways to 'get by' and so on, must not be overlooked. It is how Tommy Butler weighs such information against that provided by the battalions involved in public policy initiatives which will determine the extent to which he connects with the inclusion, achievement and citizenship agenda or opts for something else'. (Williamson, 2010, p.15).

Potential adverse impacts

8.18. There is limited evidence of potentially adverse impacts; the main risks (other than policy that is ineffective) identified in the literature reviewed are:

- negative experiences of EET or EET support services, which can create or exacerbate or entrench pre-existing dispositional barriers to engaging with EET or EET support services (such as a distrust and/or a loss of confidence which can demotivate people);
- welfare conditionality and sanctions which can encourage some young people to stop claiming benefits, and reduce their engagement with support services and increase their risks of experiencing financial poverty⁵³ (although, as outlined in section 5, these measures can also encourage other young people to engage⁵⁴); and
- employment support which takes a 'jobs first' approach, which can risk people getting stuck in cycles of poor work/no work, which can be difficult to escape (McKnight et al., 2016; Egdell and McQuaid, 2014).

⁵³ See, for example, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the hardship associated with not claiming benefits.

⁵⁴ The Welfare Conditionality Project (2018) identified that, in relation to unemployed adults (rather than young people specifically), 'overall, welfare conditionality (in the form of benefit sanctions and mandatory appointments at Jobcentre Plus and contracted-out back-to-work agencies) did not prompt 'behaviour change'. Instead, 'benefit sanctions, and the threat of them, resulted overwhelmingly in negative impacts. Many participants reported that fear of being sanctioned was counterproductive and that it prioritised compliance with meaningless activities that were ineffective for finding work' (Stewart and Wright, 2018, p.1).

Youth Guarantees

8.19. There are youth guarantees in Scotland⁵⁵ (which have not yet been evaluated) and across the European Union (EU)⁵⁶ (which have been evaluated) ILO, 2017). There is evidence from the EU that schemes in Finland and Sweden resulted in lower unemployment and it is argued that youth guarantees can:

- help young people make more informed decisions about their transition to work;
- enhance the scale of EET support services (reducing the risk that young people 'fall through the net'), and
- increase the speed with which EET services can respond (which can be particularly important in minimising scarring effects) (Massimiliano, 2012; Green and Taylor, 2020) although the evidence here is mixed (EC, 2018).

8.20. However, the evidence also suggests that youth guarantees:

- work better with those who are already work ready and that further action is needed to reach those who are more disengaged;
- are enabled and constrained by structural factors, such as the strength of the labour market and levels of resourcing; and
- other studies suggest that only limited evidence exists concerning their long-term effectiveness (O'Reilly, et al. 2015, cited in Green and Taylor, 2020; ILO, 2017).

8.21. Therefore, the evidence reviewed for this study suggests that there is nothing necessarily transformative about youth guarantees, particularly when made up of the existing interventions whose efficacy (as outlined in sections 4 to 6) is only moderate. Indeed, those European countries with the most successful implementation of youth

⁵⁵ The Scottish youth guarantee aims to 'connect every 16 to 24 year old in Scotland to an opportunity'. Further details are available at The Young Persons Guarantee's website

⁵⁶ These provide a 'guarantee' of assistance to young people to re-engage with EET within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. The type of pf support offered differs between countries. It includes a mix of: education and training for employment programmes; support for those who have or are at risk of dropping out of education; support for job searching; active labour market policies such as job creation schemes and incentives and subsidies for employers to hire young people and for young people to start their own businesses. (ILO, 2017).

guarantees tended to have the most effective pre-guarantee system of employment support (EC, 2018).

Interventions' applicability to a Wales context

8.22. A comprehensive evaluation of Welsh policy was well beyond the scope of this study⁵⁷, but the available evidence from evaluations of programmes such as CfW and CfW+ (Welsh Government, 2023b) suggests that policy in Wales is broadly in line with the evidence of what works. The problem is, this only works moderately well overall and, as outlined in the review's first report, appears to fail some groups, such as disabled young people. This was also the position taken by many participants at the workshop who typically expressed overall confidence in the strength of the offer in Wales, alongside more specific concerns such as:

- those young people who are NEET, but not currently engaged by EET support services; for example, as one contributor put it, 'we must move to find the hardest to reach';
- the need for better regional and local planning and coordination; as one contributor put it, 'how do we knit all it all together, message it, package it?' and as another put it, we have 'got a clear national offer, SPF [Shared Prosperity Fund] local offers need to knit together';
- weakness in work support; for example, as one contributor put it, 'we don't do a lot or enough of it'.⁵⁸

8.23. Moreover, as one contributor observed, 'we are trying to do different things, but we have less money! [particularly since the end of ESF monies]'.

8.24. Given these concerns, there was particular interest amongst workshop participants in:

- new ways to reach out to and influence young people, such as detached youth work, extending the role of the third sector, and work with influencers, including work with young people's peers, schools and, potentially, parents;

⁵⁷ The forthcoming evaluation of the YPG will consider this.

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that the new In-Work Support Service 'provides support and training to help people and businesses improve workplace wellbeing', including 'support to help employed and self-employed people manage their health condition and either return to work or remain in work' and training and support ...to help business improve workplace wellbeing' (Welsh Government, 2023f).

- the potential for segmentation; for example, as one contributor observed, there are ‘different groups of NEET [young people] and how each has their own challenge - should we have a strategy therefore for each and a clear journey of support for each?’⁵⁹; and
- developing in-work support, such as a ‘mentoring model focus upon the industry they want, work with employers, create tasters, work experience, help them get over the line’ and developing the role of trusted adults, ‘someone there, who’s got your back’. There was also interest in working with employers; as one contributor put it, ‘stimulate private sector employers to play a part in supporting and mentoring’.

Opportunities, levers and barriers

- 8.25. The end of the ESF in Wales has brought some opportunities, in allowing the development of more flexible programmes such as CfW+ but is generally viewed by stakeholders interviewed for this study as a major net loss for Wales, given the cuts in overall funding (see Welsh Government, 2022d) and fragmentation of SPF funding across 22 local authorities.
- 8.26. More broadly, as outlined above, the context is a key determinant of the effectiveness of EET support. As figure 8.1 illustrates, the rapid review of employment policy and context, to inform the refresh of the Wales Employability Strategy (Wilson, 2021) identifies seven key drivers of employment policy, with differing degrees of Welsh Government control and influence. They note that the limited control and influence over key levers such as labour market policy inevitably limits the scope of any Welsh Government youth guarantee. For example, the Welsh Government’s scope to stimulate demand (and help create employment opportunities) and/or reform the welfare system (e.g. to increase the financial incentives associated with employment), is constrained.

⁵⁹ This could, for example, include development of the continuum of support offered by Working Wales and more targeted programmes such as JGW+ and CfW+.

Figure 8.1. Drivers of employment policy and extent of Welsh Government control or influence

Driver	Responsibility	WG control/ influence
1. Macroeconomic stability	UK	Low control, low influence
2. Economic development	UK and Wales	High control, medium influence
3. Active labour market policy	UK and Wales	Medium control, medium influence
4. Skills policy	Wales	High control
5. Employment regulation/ practice	UK	Low control, medium influence
6. Make Work Pay policies	UK	Low control, low influence
7. Wider social policies	Wales	High control

Source: Institute for Employment Studies

8.27. The need to align Welsh policy with DWP policy is clearly important. The experience of programmes like CfW suggests that strong partnership working at an operational level is possible, but that this can still be undermined by decisions made at a strategic level, such as the introduction of new programmes like ReStart, that can end up in effect competing with existing Welsh provision (Welsh Government, 2023b).

9. Conclusions

What works

- 9.1. There is a reasonably large body of evidence identifying ‘what works’ to help young people with protected characteristics or complex barriers enter and sustain education, employment and training (and also lessons and good practice). As outlined in sections 4 to 6, this focuses upon ‘what works’ in relation to:
- engaging young people; and
 - enhancing young people’s motivation, capabilities and/or access to opportunities, to help them access EET and to then sustain that re-engagement and progress in EET.
- 9.2. The key message from the review is that there is no ‘silver bullet’ (or panacea); but what works is reasonably well understood and involves:
- focusing upon young people to better understand their motivation, capabilities and/or access to opportunities, which can enable and constrain their engagement with EET support services as much as their engagement with EET opportunities;
 - focusing upon employers and also education or training providers, to better understand their expectations and the EET opportunities open to young people. This can help ensure that support for young people equips them with the capabilities, attitudes and behaviours employers or education and training providers expect; that those providing support can broker access to opportunities and that young people’s aspirations are aligned with their capabilities and the EET opportunities they can access;
 - supporting young people in a flexible, responsive, person-centred way, through the dual roles of a trusted adult and lead professional, who can provide pastoral and practical support themselves and broker access to EET opportunities and support from others (e.g. health and housing services) where needed; and
 - doing all of this well by, for example, ensuring that staff have the motivation and capabilities and access to opportunities (such as support from partners) they

need to perform their roles and that programmes are adequately funded and robustly evaluated.

- 9.3. However, this evidence base is largely restricted to ‘what works’ for those young people who engage with EET support services (as they are included in evaluations) and much less is known about ‘what works’ with those who do not engage (who are generally not included in evaluations).

What works for whom?

- 9.4. Young people who re-engage are likely to follow different pathways; for example:
- some are likely to be in period of transition, or perhaps undecided about where to go next. They may respond proactively to marketing and may only require a light touch support to find their path;
 - some may be encouraged to re-engage by trusted adults, including their parents, but also, for example, EET support workers, youth workers and potentially their peers, but these young people may require support to translate this motivation to re-engage into practice;
 - some may experience turning points in their lives, perhaps in response to fateful moments like bereavement, which lead them re-assess what they want to do, but who also may need support to translate this motivation to re-engage into practice; and
 - some may need the support first to help them ‘stabilise’ their lives, before they can contemplate re-engaging.
- 9.5. As section 5 outlines, employment support programmes appear to work best with those who are more highly skilled, qualified and motivated. However, the degree of additionality is often modest; that is to say, many young people engaged by the programmes would have entered employment without the evaluated support (IES, 2020). As one study identifies ‘the experience of many labour market programmes is that support ends up benefiting those closest to the labour market, many of whom may find work without support at all’ (Damm et al., 2020).
- 9.6. In contrast, those with the weakest capabilities, motivation and/or most constrained opportunities, who are less likely to re-engage with EET without support are also

both generally the hardest to engage and support and the less likely to achieve positive outcomes if they do engage with EET support services. As the review's first report outlines, outcomes for some groups, such as disabled young people, are particularly poor. Those who do not engage, by definition do not benefit from support, and the longer they are NEET, the greater the risk they get 'stuck' or even regress, losing capabilities and motivation.

9.7. This raises difficult questions about where best to target scarce resources; for example to:

- focus upon interventions whose effectiveness has been demonstrated, but demonstrated to only have a moderate impact and to not reach some target groups; or
- to focus upon interventions whose effectiveness has not (yet) been demonstrated (evaluated), but which may benefit groups who are not currently being effectively engaged and/or supported by existing interventions.

What are the interventions' applicability to a Wales context? How well do they align with other Welsh Government strategies and priorities?

9.8. The (limited) evidence from this review (which was not a comprehensive evaluation of policy) suggests that existing policies are evidence based; for example:

- the YEPF has a strong focus upon early identification;
- programmes like Working Wales and CfW+ offer personalised advice, coaching and support; and
- programmes such as JGW+ and CFW+ offer additional support and access to training and work placements.

9.9. However, the evidence suggests that they only work moderately well, as:

- large numbers of young people are not engaging with EET support services, and they risk becoming stuck, or even regressing, if their capabilities and motivation to re-engage with EET decays over time; and
- many of those who are supported by EET support services would be likely to re-engage in the absence of support (meaning there is limited additionality),

although they might do so more slowly and/or struggle to sustain their re-engagement with EET in the absence of support.

9.10. Therefore, simply doing more of the same is unlikely to be sufficient. The review highlights three broad areas for action:

- engaging young people who are NEET but not currently engaging with EET support services;
- supporting young people with the weakest capabilities, motivation and/or most constrained opportunities, to enable them to re-engage with EET; and
- supporting young people to sustain and progress in EET.

9.11. The review is also clear that it is not just what is done but how well it is done that makes a difference. Therefore, it is possible, although beyond the scope of this review to assess this, that the problem is more a gap between policy intent and practice, rather than gaps in policy. So, rather than new programmes, what may be required is a change in the culture and practice of existing programmes; for example, while a commitment to person-centred approaches is a common feature of EET support services, evaluations of programmes and young people's experiences of those programmes highlight how, for example:

- young people can feel programme staff do not have enough time to get to know them, understand them and support them⁶⁰; and
- staff can feel constrained by programmes' targets, rules and regulations and short term project funding and a lack of autonomy (which limits their ability to exercise their own judgement), which can put the programmes' interests above those of the young person⁶¹.

⁶⁰ This is most evident in their accounts of experiences with JCP staff (Welsh Government, 2023b).

⁶¹ For example, CfW+ staff compared the greater flexibility they felt they had compared to CfW staff who were more constrained by targets, rules and regulations linked to ESF funding for the programme (Welsh Government, 2023b).

Engaging and supporting young people who are NEET but not currently engaging with EET support services

9.12. A key challenge for Wales is, as the review's first report highlighted, that some young people have:

- weak or weakened capabilities (for example, as a result of mental health difficulties, neurodevelopmental conditions or difficulties in school);
- constrained access to quality opportunities (for example, as a result of caring responsibilities, difficulties travelling and/or weaknesses in local labour markets); and/or
- a mismatch between their aspirations and their capabilities and/or access to employment opportunities.

9.13. These challenges have left many demotivated and either stuck or regressing (for example, where capabilities that are not exercised, weaken, particularly in the wake of the pandemic). This is a key concern as the longer they are NEET, the greater the risk they will struggle to re-engage in the future.

9.14. Although, as noted, there is less evidence about what works with this group, given the evidence about what works and why, and also what else might work, it is reasonable to infer that efforts to re-engage them and to support them will need to be founded upon:

- firstly, an understanding and focus upon young people's thinking and behaviour and their lived experience, with, for example, a focus upon evidence and theory informed practice (for example, using the COM-B model as in this review) and co-production, in order to inform both how young people are initially engaged by EET support services and how EET services support them;
- secondly, an understanding and focus upon the expectations of, and opportunities offered by, employers and education and training providers, in order to ensure that, as far as possible, young people's aspirations and motivations (including interventions such as independent IAG to shape their aspirations) are aligned with their capabilities and access to opportunities;

- thirdly, working with young people in a flexible, responsive, person-centred way through the dual roles of a trusted adult and lead professional, offering pastoral and practical support and brokerage to EET opportunities and other sources of support to:
 - enhance and sustain their motivation (by building young people’s self-efficacy and understanding of opportunities and options);
 - build their capabilities to take up EET opportunities (through training and work placements and support for their health); and
 - expand their access to opportunities (through support and advice around childcare and travel).
- fourthly, the exercise of systems leadership that pushes collaboration beyond existing models of partnership working, such as establishing mechanisms to refer young people between partners, changing and challenging the system. This could involve an individual advisor in an EET support service ensuring that a young person judged at risk of dropping out was flagged to student support services as at risk. At the other end of the spectrum, it could include work at local authority or regional level through, for example, a Public Service Board, Regional Skills Partnership or Regional Partnership Board, to address systemic weaknesses in housing, post-16 education and training provision, or mental health services for young people.

9.15. This will need to be underpinned by:

- a continuum of support, ranging from light touch IAG through to more intensive and long term support for young people with, for example, limited capabilities (for example, as result of mental ill health or ALN) and/or access to opportunities (for example, as a result of their personal circumstances such as homelessness), and (as outlined above, see e.g. para 9.13) there may be a need to develop new approaches to provide this type of long term support;
- an invest to save approach, that balances the costs of supporting a young person now, against the social and economic costs over a lifetime associated with disengagement from EET;

- an acceptance that not every young person will be ready to re-engage (and expanding time and resources on them at this point would be inefficient), alongside a medium term commitment to ensure that when they are ready, support is available;
- effective delivery by, for example, ensuring that staff have the motivation and capabilities and access to opportunities (such as support from partners) that they need to perform their roles and that programmes are adequately funded and robustly, but also intelligently, monitored and evaluated to ensure that, for example, targets do not encourage a focus upon those easiest to help. Quality and responsiveness are likely to be particularly important for young people who are furthest from re-engagement, and who may not have the patience to wait and/or to put up with services that they feel let them down. Negative experiences of support risks confirming and reinforcing their lack of trust in services, and a lack of belief they can re-engage with EET, making future re-engagement with them even more difficult; and
- a conducive context, including access to quality EET opportunities (which is only partly within the Welsh Government's control) and support from partners, such as the DWP, further and higher education providers, and the health and youth services.

9.16. However, it is important to bear in mind that young people with the weakest capabilities, motivation and/or most constrained opportunities, who are most in need of support, are also the hardest to help, potentially reducing the cost-effectiveness of work with this group. The uncertainty about what works is therefore a key gap in the evidential base and as noted, makes decisions about prioritising how finite and shrinking resources, given the cuts in overall funding with the end of ESF monies, are best invested, even more challenging.

9.17. It is also important to bear in mind that judgements of cost-effectiveness also depend upon the measures of impact chosen; for example:

- those who are open to learning may re-engage with EET more rapidly with support (even if they were likely to re-engage at some point without support);

- an ethos such as the Capability Approach contends that the aim of support should be to maximise young people's freedom to choose what they value, rather than simply getting them into a job (Edgell and McQuaid, 2014); and
- The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 focuses attention upon seven well-being goals, meaning, while entry to EET, with its contribution to a prosperous and potentially more equal Wales, is important, other approaches that may not have as great an impact upon EET (and economic) outcomes, but which have a greater impact upon health, equality and/or community cohesions, may be equally valid.

9.18. The Well-being of Future Generations Act emphasises prevention (discussed in section 7) and also raises important questions about the amount of resources allocated to trying to stop young people becoming NEET and helping those who are NEET.

Partnership working and co-production

9.19. The Well-Being of Future Generations Act's focus upon collaboration, integration and involvement is also highly relevant and, as outlined in section 8, is recommended in the research reviewed. The importance of better understanding the lived experience of young people and their motivations, capabilities and access to opportunities and behaviours, in order to better understand how to engage and support them, reinforces the importance of co-production. The range of factors that shape their motivations, capabilities and access to opportunities, reinforces the importance of partnership working. However, while an easy concept to support, both partnership working and co-production have often proved challenging to effectively deliver; as with the other areas of practice considered, there are examples of good practice, but no silver bullets.

The likely efficacy of youth guarantees

9.20. As section 8 outlines, there is evidence from the EU that schemes in Finland and Sweden resulted in lower unemployment. However, the evidence reviewed for this study suggests that there is nothing necessarily transformative about youth guarantees, particularly when made up of the existing interventions, whose efficacy

(as outlined in sections 4 to 6) is only moderate. What countries choose to do (the integration that underpins a youth guarantee) and how they do it (in terms of resourcing and delivery), are therefore more important than the making of a guarantee. The design and implementation of the YPG in Wales will be further explored in the forthcoming evaluation of the YPG.

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Annex A. workshop participants

Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language (ESWL) Group – Social Partnership

Economy, Treasury and Constitution (ETC) – Business and Regions

ETC – Business and Regions

The Wellbeing Planner

ESJWL – Social Partnership

ETC – Business and Regions

People and Work

ESJWL – Social Partnership

People and Work

ESJWL – Social Partnership

ESJWL – Social Partnership

ESJWL – Social Partnership

ESJWL – Social Partnership

ESJWL – Education – Youth Engagement

ESJWL – Social Partnership

ESJWL – Social Partnership

Appendix B. Detail of Searches (for stages 1 and 2 of the review)

Source	Search term	No. Items reviewed	No. Items included
Google	Review OR Evidence AND “young people” AND Employment OR NEET OR Barriers	40	6
Google	Review OR evidence AND barriers AND “young people” AND employment OR Education OR training OR NEET	30	3
Google	Barriers AND NEET AND systematic research	30	2
Google	EEPI Centre AND Review OR evidence AND barriers AND “young people” AND employment OR Education OR training OR NEET	20	0
Google	JSTOR AND Review OR evidence AND barriers AND “young people” AND employment OR Education OR training OR NEET	30	3
Google	Site search Wales wales.gov followed by google WELSH GOVERNMENT AND NEET OR youth AND employment	40	6
Site search – Scottish government	NEET followed by Youth Employment	25	0

Google	Scottish government AND NEET	30	0
Google	Scottish Government AND Youth AND employment	30	0
JSTOR	Review OR evidence AND barriers AND “young people” AND employment OR Education OR training OR NEET	30	1
SITE SEARCH UK GOV	NEET	70	2
GOV.UK SITE SEARCH	YOUTH EMPLOYMENT	30	0
NI direct website (NI government)	NEET	20	0
NI direct website (NI government)	Youth Employment	20	0
Learning and Work Institute site search	NEET and then Youth Employment	12	1
Welsh centre for public policy site search	NEET then youth employment, then youth unemployment	5	0
Youth Futures Foundation	NEET and then Youth Employment	18	3

Institute of Employment Studies	NEET and then Youth Employment	17	3
Google Scholar	Review OR Evidence AND “young people” AND Employment OR NEET OR Barriers	100	3
Google	UK AND NEET AND physical disability AND research OR systematic review OR evidence OR evaluation	40	0
Google	UK AND NEET AND intersectional AND research OR evaluation OR evidence OR systematic review	50	5
Google	UK AND NEET AND women AND research OR evaluation OR evidence OR systematic review	40	2
Google	UK AND NEET AND BAME OR ethnicity AND research OR evaluation OR evidence OR systematic review	30	0
Google	UK AND NEET AND RURAL AND research OR evaluation OR evidence OR systematic review	20	0
Google	UK AND NEET AND disability AND Research OR evidence OR review OR evaluation	30	3
Google	UK AND NEET AND mental health AND Research OR evidence OR review OR evaluation	50	8

EPPI centre	review OR evidence AND employment AND young people OR NEET OR barriers OR Training ⁶²	20	1
Google	Research OR evaluation OR review OR evidence AND "young pe* Guarantee" OR "Youth Guarantee" AND employment	80	
Google	Research OR evaluation OR review OR evidence AND young person's guarantee AND Scotland	1	
Google	Review OR Evidence AND "young people" AND worklessness	40	

⁶² The EPPI Centre list of systematic reviews was also checked.

Annex C. Methodological Note for Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. was created through a number of steps, outlined below.

Step 1 On the 4th of April 2023 DWP Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and JSA and Universal Credit (UC) data⁶³ for the years 2016, 2017, 2018 and the age groups of ‘under 18’ and ‘18-24’ was downloaded via [NOMIS](#)⁶⁴. It was decided to provide a 3 year average in order to lessen the risk of one year being particularly high or low.

Step 2 A three-year average calculation of the above data was then made, as shown below (the *italic bold* represent formulas we added to the downloaded core data to calculate this). ESA data in **amber**, JSA in **blue** and JC & UC in **purple**.

Date	ESA	ESA	JSA	ESA	JSA & UC	JSA & UC
	aged under 18	aged 18-24	aged under 18	aged 18-24	aged under 18	Aged 18-24
February 2016	270	11860	30	6860	35	11665
May 2016	240	11790	20	5090	20	10745
August 2016	220	11780	20	4320	30	11020
November 2016	260	11820	30	3440	35	10455
Total	990	47250	100	19710	120	43885
Average total	247.5	11812.5	25	4927.5	30	10971.25

⁶³ JSA and UC was only available combined.

⁶⁴ Note this is not a direct link to the data as this was accessed via a ‘sign in’ and hence no direct link available. However, a picture of the data is shown below.

February 2017	250	11810	20	3560	25	10375
May 2017	240	11570	20	3070	25	10110
August 2017	210	11520	10	2730	25	9685
November 2017	260	11320	20	2330	30	9300
Total	960	46220	70	11690	105	39470
Average total	240	11555	17.5	2922.5	26.25	9867.5
February 2018	210	10760	20	3290	65	9970
May 2018	180	10170	20	2830	95	9695
August 2018	140	9600	10	2480	120	9590
November 2018	120	8770		1830	150	9855
Total	650	39300	50	10430	430	39110
Average total	162.5	9825	16.66667	2607.5	107.5	9777.5
3 year average	216.6667	11064.17	19.72222	3485.833	54.58333	10205.42

Step 3 On the 4th of April 2023 NEET population data through ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates & Annual Population Survey, HESA, LLWR, PLASC data via [StatsWales](https://www.stats.gov.uk) was downloaded for the years 2016, 2017, 2018 and the age groups 16-18 and 19-24.

As previous the *Italic bold* represent formulas we added to the downloaded core data to calculate this). Aged 16-18 data in **green**, 19-24 in **pink**.

NEET 16-18				NEET 19-24		
2016	2017	2018	<i>3 year average</i>	2016	2017	2018
11300	10600	10800	10900	46000	36900	38500

Step 4 As shown above and stated under table 4.1 in the report the age ranges from both sources did not comply. Therefore, the NEET population was changed in order to better reflect the ESA, JSA and UC age range (step 2) i.e. minus an average one year NEET population 16-18 from the NEET 16-18 population and adding an average one year NEET population 16-18 to the NEET 19-24 population. This means the total for 16-24 NEET population is the same just distributed differently.

NEET 16-18 to produce estimated under 18

2016	2017	2018	<i>Under 18 total</i>	<i>Minus 3 year average</i>	<i>New total</i>	<i>3 year average</i>
11300	10600	10800	32700	10900	21800	7266.667

NEET 19-24 to produce estimated 18-24

2016	2017	2018	<i>19-24 total</i>	<i>Plus 3 year average</i>	<i>New total</i>	<i>3 year average</i>
46000	36900	38500	121400	10900	132300	44100

Step 5 Data from the previous steps was then used to produce table 4.1. For example, highlighted **yellow** below, the 20 claiming JSA (step 2, last blue column aged under 18) is divided by 7,267 (step 4, 3 year average of NEET 16-18 estimated population further green column on the right) to produce the percentage in the table of 0.3% and so forth.

The number of young people aged under 18* and young people 18-24* claiming selected welfare benefits, and the estimated percentage of all young people aged under 18 and 18-24 who are NEET, who are claiming these selected welfare benefits. This is based upon an average calculated over three years (2016, 2017 and 2018).

	Under 18*		18-24*	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Claiming JSA	20	0.3%	3,486	8%
Claiming ESA	217	3%	11,064	25%
Claimant (JSA + UC)	55	1%	10,205	23%
UC (not included JSA)	35	1%	6,719	15%
Not claiming ESA or JSA	7,030	97%	29,550	67%
Not claiming ESA or JSA or UC	6,995	96%	22,831	51%
Total YP who are NEET	7,267	100%	44,100	100%

YP REA – Topic guide

Ensure the interviewee has had the privacy notice and Information sheet and provides consent.

[Review objectives included here for reference]

1. Who do you work with? [i.e. which groups of young people?]

- What type of barriers do the young people you work with face? [link to COM-B framework if helpful]
- How do they intersect or interact?
- To what extent are these barriers or characteristics the cause (reason) why the young people you work with are NEET? and to what extent are they a consequence of being NEET?

2. What do you do?

- How do you reach out and engage young people?
- How do you identify them? how are they referred to you?
- What do you do to help them re-engage with education, training or employment? [link to COM-B framework if helpful e.g. how you build motivation, capabilities etc].
- Do you provide support after they re-engage?

3. What differences does your support make to young people? [what impact does it have?]

- How does it enhance their capabilities, motivation and/or access to opportunities?
- What difference does re-engaging with education, training or employment make to young people?
- Why does it make a difference?

4. Who do you struggle with? [are there young people you can't help?

- What holds them back or stops you helping them move forward?
- what defines them – e.g. barriers or characteristics?
- Why?

Who else do you work with? [e.g. partners]

- How do you work with partners?
- Do you / can you join up with other services and employers to provide support for barriers, such as mental health?
- What helps and/or and hinders this (i.e. collaboration)?

Has any of this changed following the pandemic and/or cost of living crisis?

E.g. who you work with? how you work with young people? their outcomes? your partners? etc)

What works / how does it work?

- What is it about the way you work with young people that works well / is effective?
- How does it differ to more mainstream provision (e.g. JCP, Careers Wales, CfW etc)?
- What doesn't work so well? (barriers, constraints)

Do you involve young people? if so how? [this is about co-production – e.g. involving young people in developing delivering and/or evaluating programmes]

What would you like to see changed?

- What changes would you like to see in policy and/or practice in Wales? why?

Is there anything else we've not talked about that you think is important?

Do you have any questions?

Thank you