

Briefing Paper: Young people and work: interim report

Newcastle Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP)

Date: 1st June 2026

Audience: Statutory and relevant safeguarding partners across education, local authority services, health, police, voluntary and community sector

Purpose of this briefing

This briefing summarises the safeguarding implications of the national review, [Young people and work: interim report](#), which examines the increasing number of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Its purpose is to support safeguarding partners to understand how youth disengagement connects to vulnerability, risk and lived experience, and how this aligns with existing NSCP priorities relating to vulnerable adolescents, neglect, mental health and exploitation.

Context and Rationale

The report describes a growing and sustained national issue, with nearly one million young people not in education, employment or training, representing around one in eight of this age group. It highlights that this is no longer a short-term issue of unemployment, but a deeper pattern of disengagement. A significant proportion of young people who are NEET are economically inactive, meaning they are not seeking work and are often disconnected from the systems designed to support them.

A central theme within the report is the increasing role of health and disability. It identifies a marked rise in the number of young people who are NEET due to a work-limiting health condition, with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression now prominent features.

The report also makes clear that these outcomes are rarely sudden. Indicators of future disengagement are often visible much earlier in childhood and adolescence. It explicitly references factors such as poor school readiness, absence, low attainment, special educational needs, family adversity and disengagement from education as signs that are often recognised but not acted on early enough.

Overall, the review concludes that this is not the result of a single issue but reflects wider weaknesses across education, health, welfare and employment systems, which together are not consistently supporting young people to move successfully into adulthood.

What This Means in Practice

For safeguarding partners, the report reinforces that disengagement from education, training or employment should be understood within the wider context of a young person's life. It may reflect a combination of factors rather than a single cause, including poor mental health, family adversity, or other barriers that limit participation.

The report highlights that some young people are not only out of education and work but are also not in receipt of benefits or connected to services. This group may be particularly difficult to identify, as no single system holds responsibility for them, increasing the risk that they remain unseen.

In practice, this means that partners need to look beyond whether a young person is participating and consider what is influencing their ability to engage. The report suggests that systems often record risk factors but do not act on them early enough, which can result in young people becoming detached before support is put in place.

The findings also point to the importance of transitions, particularly as young people move out of compulsory education. Where pathways into further education, training or employment are limited, or where support is not coordinated, there is an increased likelihood of disengagement.

Key Messages for Partners

The report presents youth disengagement as a wider societal issue with direct implications for safeguarding partners. It highlights that early indicators are known and recorded, but that responsibility for acting on them is often unclear or inconsistent.

It also challenges assumptions about young people's motivation, noting that most young people who are NEET express a desire to work or engage in education or training. The issue, therefore, is not a lack of aspiration, but the interaction between individual needs and systems that are not effectively enabling participation.

The report emphasises that mental health is now a defining feature of youth disengagement, with increasing numbers of young people experiencing conditions that affect their ability to participate. At the same time, it identifies that existing systems may unintentionally reinforce disengagement by focusing on incapacity rather than supporting participation.

Overall, the report highlights the absence of a coherent, shared system focused on helping young people move from education into work, with responsibilities spread across different services but without clear accountability.

Engagement and Next Steps

Partners are asked to reflect on how their agency identifies and responds to young people who are at risk of disengagement from education, training or employment.

The report highlights that no single system currently has full responsibility for supporting young people into participation, and that improved coordination between education, health, welfare and local services is required. In this context, partners should consider how existing arrangements can better identify young people who are disconnected and ensure that support is in place at the earliest possible stage.

There is also a need to consider how local data and assurance arrangements can provide greater visibility of young people who may not be in contact with services, in line with the report's findings that some groups remain outside existing systems of support.

The immediate focus should be on strengthening how current systems work together, ensuring that young people remain visible, supported and able to move safely into adulthood.