



A POLICY REVIEW INTO 16- 18 PROVISION & NEET CHALLENGES

AUGUST 2024

AUTHORED BY:
ALEX MILES

Managing Director of Yorkshire
Learning Providers & Co-Chair of
the Northern Skills Network

SUPPORTED BY:

NORTHERN POWERHOUSE
PARTNERSHIP

ASCENTIS AWARDING
ORGANISATION

NCFE EDUCATION CHARITY

ABOUT



The Northern Skills Network (NSN) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to representing and advocating for training and education providers across the North of England.

The NSN is the network of networks, that brings together 8 regional provider networks across, who represent over 490 employment & skills organisations, ranging from FE Colleges, Independent Training Providers, Universities, Local Authorities, employer providers and 3rd sector charitable organisations.



OUR VISION

Aligned with the Northern Powerhouse agenda, NSN is passionate about enhancing productivity and prosperity in the North. We aim to elevate skill levels for both young people entering the workforce and current employees seeking further development.

Through our collaborative efforts, we strive to make a significant impact on the region's economic growth and success.

OUR MISSION

Our primary mission is to promote the interests of our member networks and to serve as a unified voice for skills development across the North. We are committed to advancing vocational and technical education, including all funded training provision, and highlighting their value to employers and key stakeholders.

OUR MEMBERS

NSN comprises eight provider networks from various regions, including North East, Tees Valley, Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside, Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, and Cheshire and Warrington.

Collectively, we represent over 400 Training Providers, of all types, including FE Colleges, ITPs, VCSE Organisations, Local Authorities, Employer Providers, and more!

INTRODUCTION

With rising population figures of 16-18 years olds, growing numbers of Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) figures and reducing numbers of young people being able to access their legal entitlement to education, now is the time to address a policy that is not fit for purpose and highlight the areas that need immediate attention.

By completing this research and policy review into the NEET issues across key cities and towns in the North of England, we aim to provide insight into understanding the consequences of not addressing this issue, plus identification of the barriers to access and inclusion, policy mismatch between national and local activity, lack of growth and support for new or hyper-local provision and opportunities to explore solutions.

RATIONALE

There is a growing & concerning demand and challenge with 16-18 provision to meet needs at local & regional level across the North – particularly for those who are the most disadvantaged and need support. Much of this need is focused at level 2 and below young people where we know there is a big gap in provision, opportunities and value.

Initial research into the demand and supply of 16-19 provision shows that there is a suitable, and growing, offer at level 3 to support those leaving school with qualifications that will enable them to commence at this level. However, there is a growing gap in offer at level 2 and below, which is set to be even further exacerbated as the qualification reforms continue to remove & displace qualifications of need.

This is resulting in many young people not able to access education at the level they require or through institutions they will excel in. 16-18-year-olds missing their legal entitlement to education or being forced into attending college provision that is not suitable resulting in NEET or not known figures increasing.

METHODOLOGY

To complete a deep dive into the key areas' NEET / NK statistics & provision offer and review the opportunities for local growth and funding to meet demand.

Explore how national policy & local need is meeting the legislative requirement for young people to access education.

Roundtable discussions with training organisations of all types, local authorities and support agencies on the barriers and potential solutions to meet local need.



NATIONAL PICTURE

Nationally, there was an increase in the number of young people aged 16 to 24 years not in education, employment or training (NEET) in January to March 2024, with the total currently estimated to be 900,000, up from 812,000 in January to March 2023.

The number of young people who were NEET and unemployed in January to March 2024 was estimated to be 320,000, an increase of 11,000 on the year (January to March 2023). The number of young men aged 16 to 24 years who were NEET and unemployed increased by 17,000 on the year to 203,000.

As England's population is projected to increase year on year until its peak in 28/29 this is an issue that requires an immediate response and review of the national strategy – even post 2029 the population is only set to decrease to the 2018/19 cohort size (ONS Principal Population Projection, 2022), when institutions were starting to report provision and engagement challenges.

Whilst this is a national crisis and challenge, our focus is on the Northern regions only and deep dives into the 16-18 demographic. The rationale for this age deep dive, is due to increased opportunities via devolved authorities for 19+ that are not available for pre-19, and the severe and growing lack of provision for this age group.

PLENARY

This review will focus on the 16–18-year-olds who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) or their destinations are Not Known (NK), and how the provision available for this group of young people is not meeting demand or need at local levels.

Having analysed the data, held a series of roundtables and met with key stakeholders within training organisations and local authorities, it is clear the 16–18 education offer, and policy is not fit for purpose and is failing young people across the North to be able to access their legal entitlement to education up to the age of 18 years old.

Whilst, there are a plethora of reasons we could explore for this policy failure, this review has grouped the findings into the 3 categories, within the body of the report, the findings will be mapped to one of the categories below -

Suitability

Aligning to need, pathways and destinations

Accessibility

Inclusion, local & hyper local, funding

Sufficiency

Resources, provider market, level

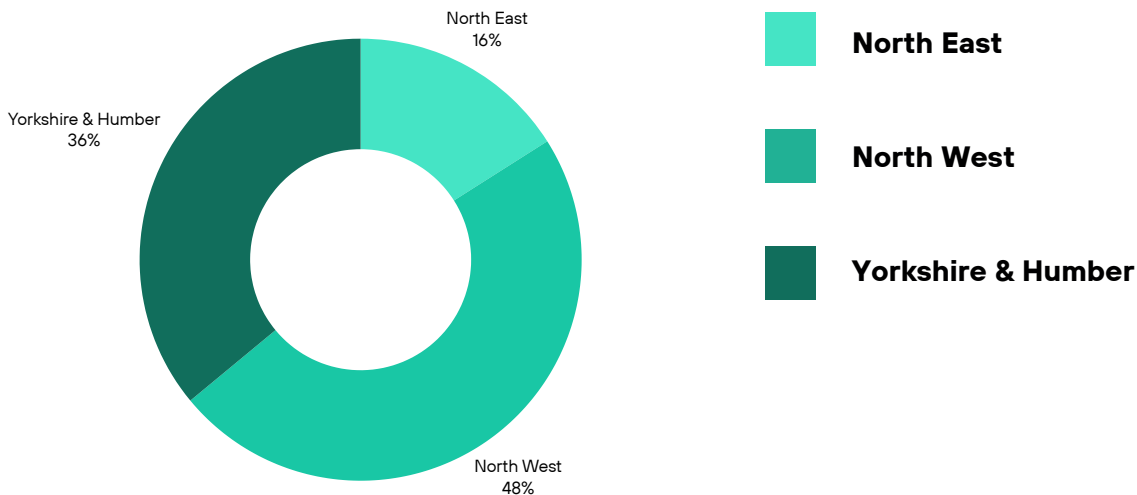
This paper will identify the failures in the system, showcase the stark data analytics from across the North, and most importantly, will provide policy asks for improvements.



POLICY REVIEW

Across the North of England there are 50 local authority areas that make up the 3 regions of North West, North East and Yorkshire & Humberside. Within all these regions there are unacceptable numbers of 16–18-year-olds who are not in Education, Employment or Training, or their status is not known. Within these regions, there are over 350,000 16-17 year olds, and a growing number of these being denied an education pathway that meets their needs or meets their legal entitlement.

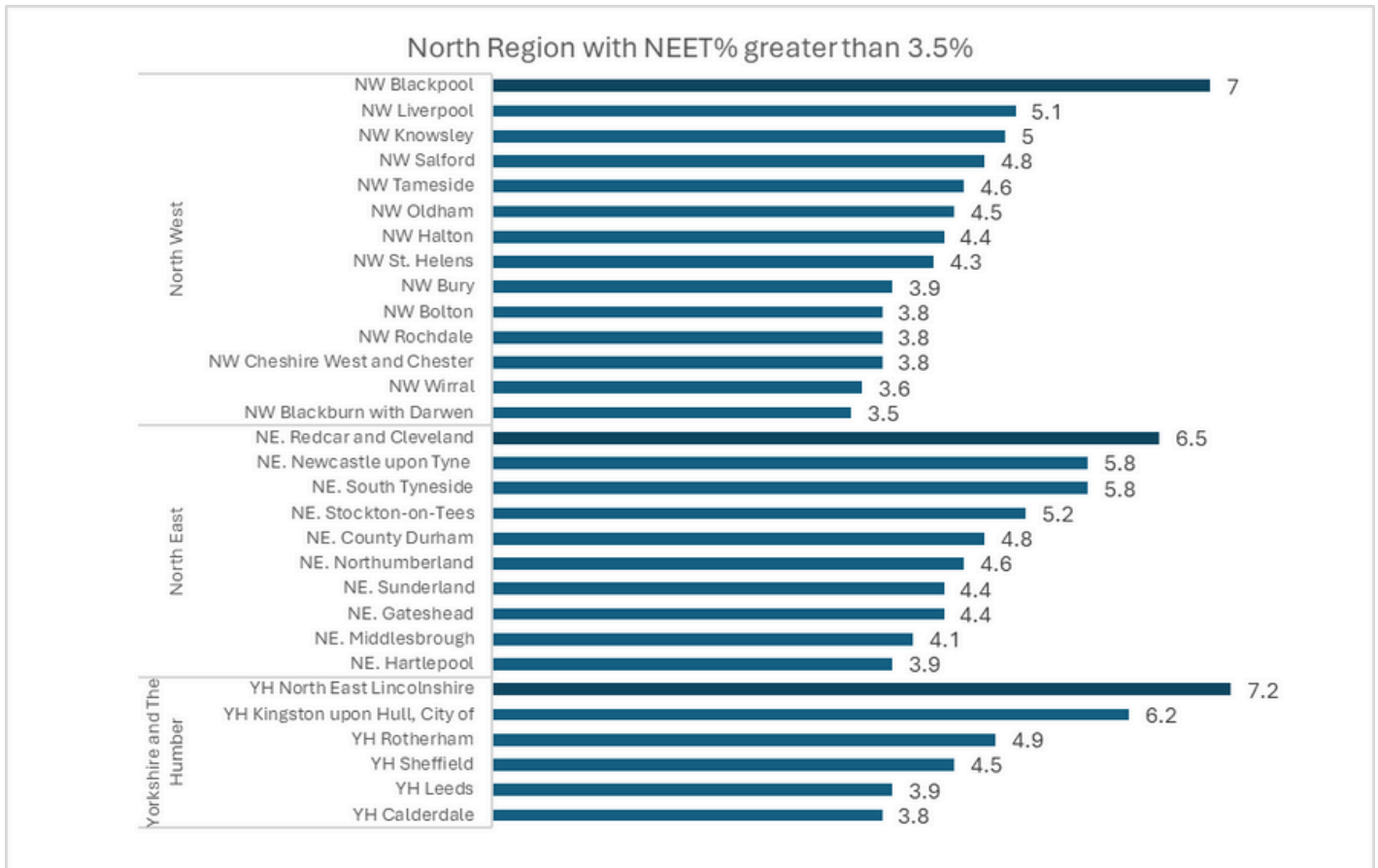
Cohort of 16–17-year-olds across the North



This issue of growing number of NEETS and Not Known young people across our core cities and towns has been a concern for local areas and councils, particularly over the last 12 months, and has now resulted in the Core Cities Group across England submitting a joint letter of concern to the Department for Education. Within this letter the group expressed the impact of the rising population of young people on their local areas, and the increasingly high demand being placed on post-16 providers for placements, often resulting in long wait lists and capacity issues, which is further exacerbating or distorting the NEET figures. [\(Sufficiency\)](#)

Across England the 2023 national average NEET figures for 16–17-year-olds was at approx. 3%, the below table highlights all the Northern areas with above a 3.5% NEET figure. As you can see this represents almost all the North and with local areas not having sufficient provision to support these NEET young people presently, this is only forecasted to increase from 24/25 and beyond as the population grows. [\(Sufficiency\)](#)

NORTH REGIONS WITH NEET % GREATER THAN 3.5%



As regional provider networks across the North, whose primary role is to represent our members voices at local, regional, northern & national level, we are constantly contacted by training organisations and local authorities to discuss the lack of provision on offer and try to identify approaches that support this. We all feel the frustration of this reactive approach, with our hands tied and no control over funding & demand mapping. **(Accessibility)**

As 16-19 provision is a national, centrally funded offer, local areas have very limited opportunities to influence or administer the need for their areas and whilst the Department for Education offer local authorities the opportunity to submit a business case for growth, that recognises the local need, these are very often not upheld, with central colleagues not recognising the local area need as a priority. **(Accessibility)**

As local networks, we have been involved in many of these business cases and provided statements of support, but the response is very often too slow to provide the provision needed to keep young people from moving further into the NEET and Not Known destinations.

The Core Cities Group recognised this frustration in their joint letter, highlighting that many are unable to meet their sufficiency duty as local authorities and demand is outstripping the ability of providers to create or fund the places needed. It is clear there needs to be an immediate focus on the accessibility to funding at capital, revenue and programme level to meet this real risk and threat of further young people becoming NEET, with this review focusing on the robustness and accessibility to apply and distribute funds that meets local intelligence. **(Sufficiency)**

Across Liverpool and Leeds there have been sufficiency reviews of Study Programme provision to meet the NEET gaps and challenges with the findings proving that we simply don't have sufficient capacity locally, the breadth of provision is insufficient, and the system supports concentration of resources into an ever-dwindling group of providers. We need to look at the flooded system and access issues if we are ever to meet the growing population demands placed on the FE sector. **(Sufficiency)**

Whilst the combined authorities do not have a duty or responsibility for 16-18 provision, there needs to be more concentrated efforts to allow combined authority level to focus on the NEET challenges, and remedial action locally as this causes issues for CA's and their adult education budget, when these young people turn 19. There is a big NEET spike in some of the local regions of 19-24-year-olds, at a time when AEB budgets are capped, and unit rates are changing causing provider capacity and response issues. There is a significant number of Young People aged 19+ who have been let down, who have complex needs and who are struggling to get support via AEB. **(Accessibility)**

We are living in a time with ever reducing opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful education and societal activity, with fewer 16-18-year-olds accessing apprenticeships than ever before, loss of pre-apprenticeship / traineeship provision to compliment study programme provision, giving extra options, more diversity of providers and localised offerings that meet localised need and a legal entitlement that is not accessible to all who need and deserve it. It is within the powers of the new Government to look at the NEET challenges and lack of 16-18 opportunities and make a real difference to the landscape and our young people, who have been neglected by previous Governments. We should use the opportunity of the apprenticeship levy reform to explore a properly funded and well thought out pre apprenticeship programme, that way we would stand a better chance of developing strong pathways into training and work. **(Sufficiency)**

As we look at the localised need, based on localised intelligence, another challenge worsening the 16-18 sufficiency, accessibility and suitability issue is the loss of the hyper-local offer due to ESF concluding, provider market reductions, loss of traineeships and study programme providers not having the funds or the want to support subcontracted provision. There is a lack of recognition for the impact this type of provision has in terms of supporting communities and young people to address the local area NEET problems. This issue is bred from the lack of understanding from central colleagues, on the social, cultural and mental health needs of young people locally, with many not wanting to, or able to, learn in big institutions or in the big towns / city centres, so by not having a hyper-local collaborative approach to this provision type, the most disadvantaged young people are becoming even more disadvantaged and the participation gap is worsening. The loss of European funds, the limited UKPSF funding and the inability for more independent providers to enter the study programme market is resulting in an immediate need for more & better targeted transition support and funding to respond to NEET young people. **(Suitability)**

Most prime study programme providers, especially colleges, are reporting they are full to capacity and even if they could grow their funding envelope, they do not have the physical space or resource to support more learners. College buildings are full, with waiting lists for students to access education, and FE is in a desperate need for more tutors. It is also reported from some local areas that the offer at colleges is not always aligned to the needs of all NEET young people, as institutions are encouraged to focus on rolling out further level 3 T-level opportunities. **(Suitability)**

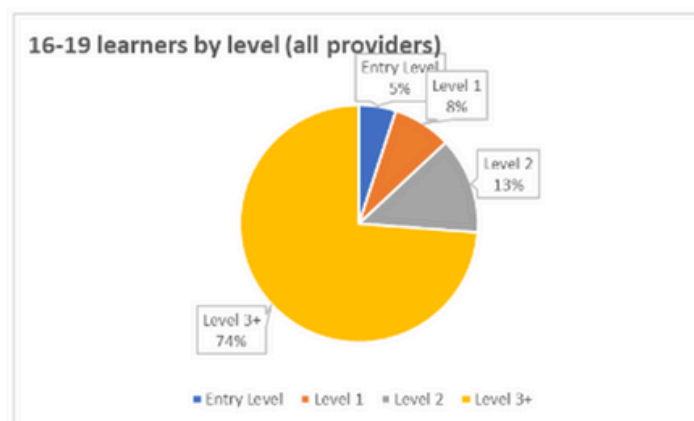
This leads us to explore the levels of provision v's the level or need and in many cases, core cities and towns are reporting the offer and need is not aligned, with too much offered at level 3, through the increased offer of T-Levels. The Government's policy of moving more funding into T levels, for people who are already capable of completing at level 3, is taking away from the large numbers of young people who are not ready for level 3 provision and further increases the gap for those who need education support the most. **(Suitability)**

The table below, provided by Leeds City Council, shows the level of learner and provision available across the city and the disparity of the offer comparable to the level young people achieved and could progress into.

Level of learner and provision available (2023 leavers)

64.6% year 11 pupils achieved a grade 9-4 in English and maths and could progress to Level 3
74% of post 16 learning provision was Level 3

34.5% of year 11s did not achieve the qualifications needed to progress to Level 3
26% of learning provision was at Entry, Level 1 and Level 2



80% achieved a Level 2 qualification by 19 compared to 84% nationally
52.4% achieved Level 3 qualifications by 19 compared to 58.8% nationally, limiting progression into technical and higher education

The disparity between level of need and level of offer is further challenging with the pending Qualification reforms due at level 2 and level 3 and the consequences of this on 16-19 pathways if it goes ahead. Many across the FE sector advocating for this reform to stop altogether so the offer isn't even further diluted for those who are unable to commence and achieve a level 3 T-level qualification or are not ready to commence an apprenticeship therefore having limited pathways other than becoming NEET. This issue was reported by FE Week, recognising that defunding programmes that act as an alternative for those unable to achieve T-level would result in there being fewer opportunities for young people, at a time when there is a growing 16-18 population, with multi-faceted education needs that do not, and should not, all end up being level 3 destination. In the article, it stated "Nearly all students who dropped out of the second wave of T Levels switched to a course that is set to be scrapped through controversial government plans. Data obtained by FE Week through the Freedom of Information (FOI) law, and analysed by the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA), revealed 90 per cent of students who switched to other technical or vocational courses chose a qualification that will be axed by 2026 under Tory reforms". **(Suitability)**

Local authorities have raised with us across the North, that the uncertain situation regarding the defunding of some L3 & L2 courses is causing apprehension on the future pathway opportunities for young people, and there is a significant risk to a further increase in NEET figures, especially those who are more vulnerable or being less likely to transition to a positive destination.

(Sufficiency)

The education pathways for those who need the most support is quickly diminishing, and with local areas reporting a surge in SEND young people and those with significant needs, we must have an education offer that meets these needs, whilst supporting their vocational and technical desires at the level and the learning environment that enables them to thrive. **(Accessibility)**

The question being asked “If funding can’t be accessed at the level of need, and colleges are full, with limited subcontracting opportunities, and there is very low take-up of apprenticeships and zero pre-apprenticeship or traineeship routeways – where do you expect these young people to go to obtain their legal entitlement to education?”

Where local partnerships are formed, through subcontracting or consortiums, they are making impactful contributions to the hyper-local, community place-based provision that is meeting need. This collaborative response to support 16–18-year-olds locally, must be explored further and not diminished or seen as unworthy of funding, if it is meeting local need, having local economic impact and ensuring young people are gaining their lawfully entitled education, there must be more parity to support this. The DfE current opportunity for new provider market entrants is limited, with a minimum spend threshold of £1m for any opportunity of growth or access, which is clearly not something the vast majority of local providers will be able to support. **(Accessibility)**

Local authorities have also raised the barrier of the lack of rolling provision throughout the year to proactively respond to young people as they become NEET, with college intake, when they have the space, being once per year. However, introducing more opportunities for training providers to be involved in study programme provision at local level, and more powers provided to the local or combined authorities to meet need, would allow for more responsive, timely, supportive provision that is in the best interests of the young people they serve. **(Sufficiency)**

A final stark concern that must be included when discussing the rise in NEET young people, is the growth in these young people being subject to enter into criminal behaviour linked to county lines and extreme groups. Across Yorkshire & The North East there has been a rise in young people joining extreme groups, and increasing youth violence that is linked to more than a decade of cuts to support these young people, like youth centres. Having insufficient places for young people in our education system, at a time when this age demographic is growing exponentially and at a time when recognising the increase in vulnerability of many young people must be the top priority for Governments and public policy at national, regional & local level. **(Accessibility)**

IN SUMMARY



The new Labour Government has inherited a 16-18 policy that is broken across most of the Northern regions, with duty, funding and implementation working against the needs of our young people. This needs an immediate and focused response to rectify the damage already in the system, before the spike in population at 16-18 makes the situation unfixable, damaging more young people, putting more pressure on colleges and training providers and pushing the problem into the 19+ age devolved powers remit that is already far too stretched.

Too many young people are missing out on their legal entitlement to access education until 18 years old, when there can be local or regional solutions that can ensure quality education is accessible, suitable and inclusive for all.



We have therefore identified six policy asks for the Government to review and act upon, working with the regional provider networks, Northern Skills Network and key stakeholders who live and breathe this every day and can support a better skills system for our young people and communities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Regions need a fair and inclusive offer for all young people not just focused at level 3, that is tailored to the local area and based on localised intelligence. Improve the process of matching need to funding.
- Increased 16-19 funding is an immediate necessity within GFE and ITPs and allow for more ITPs to enter the Study Programme market, without there being the need to deliver £1m of provision.
- Greater devolution of 16-19, for non-school provision, that can be managed, administered and procured locally to meet need.
- Introduce a pre-employment / pre-apprenticeship routeway to work, through the new Skills & Growth levy or funded via a separate, but adequate pot that allows for ALL young people to access education where they want, at the level they need, across all local locations
- Lack of diversity in provider market to be addressed, so there needs to be better recognition of types of providers, provision and locations that can support all young people and their needs. Smaller, hyper-local independent providers are no less worthy than large GFE colleges and their students are no less worthy of accessing education that suits their individual needs and legal entitlement.
- 16-19 growth to be processed much quicker and fairer, utilising the localised intelligence provided by local authorities. Supporting growth for existing providers they can respond to need and enter into localised partnerships across communities and districts.
- Whilst the increase in English & maths rates within study programme, may be welcome, it has resulted in a reduced number of young people being supported through providers allocations. This must be addressed through appropriate levels of funding allocated to this age group and study programme provision that is not all focused-on level 3.

VIEWS FROM SUPPORTING PARTNERS



Ascentis, an Awarding Organisation committed to providing high-quality qualifications, fully supports the findings outlined in this investigation addressing the challenges and demands of NEET provision in the North. Our mission to enhance educational access and success for all aligns closely with the proposed asks aimed at supporting disadvantaged young people and bridging the gaps in educational provision. A fair and inclusive offer of NEET options with more diversity is needed, especially at Level 2.

Ascentis is dedicated to working collaboratively with all involved to implement these changes and ensure that all young people, especially those who are most disadvantaged, have access to the education and training they need to succeed. By addressing these key areas, we can help build a more inclusive, fair, and effective education system with parity across varied geographical areas.



NCFE

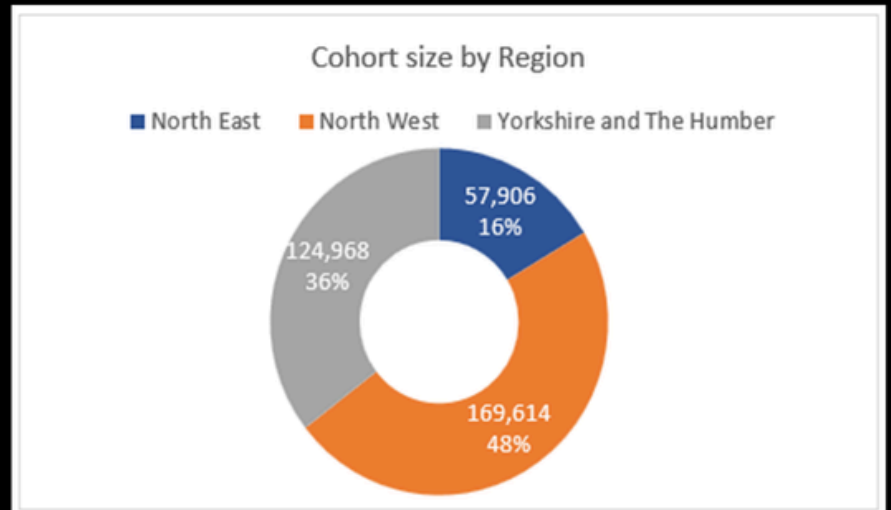
Michael Lemin, Head of Policy for NCFE, "This paper highlights long held concerns around young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the north, and the impact of limited funding and a smaller curriculum. It is vital that every 16–18-year-old in the north can find a training course that is suitable for them, and as the cohort grows over the next few years, this is a policy area which requires attention."

ANNEX A - ANALYSIS ACROSS THE NORTH

DISTRIBUTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE (16/17) IN NORTHERN ENGLAND

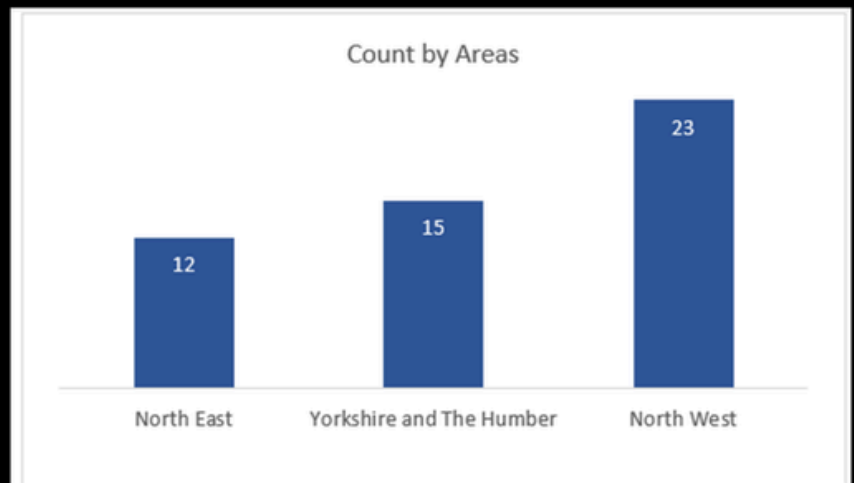
The chart provides visual representation of the total number of young people aged 16-17 in the Northern England.

North West region has the highest number of young people aged 16-17, significantly exceeding all other two regions. Yorkshire and The Humber region area has the second largest population of young people in this age group and North East having the lowest number of young people aged 16 – 17.



COUNT OF AREAS BY REGION

This provides the total number of areas in each region of Northern England. The chart shows North West Region having the highest number of areas, Yorkshire and The Humber region follows with total of 15 areas and North East having the least areas with total number of 12.



COMBINED NEET / KN BY NORTHERN REGION

This table shows all northern regions have NEET / KN combined figures that are above the national average

Nothern Region by Neet/NK%	NEET/NK%_combined
North East	5.2
North West	5.3
Yorkshire and The Humber	6.5

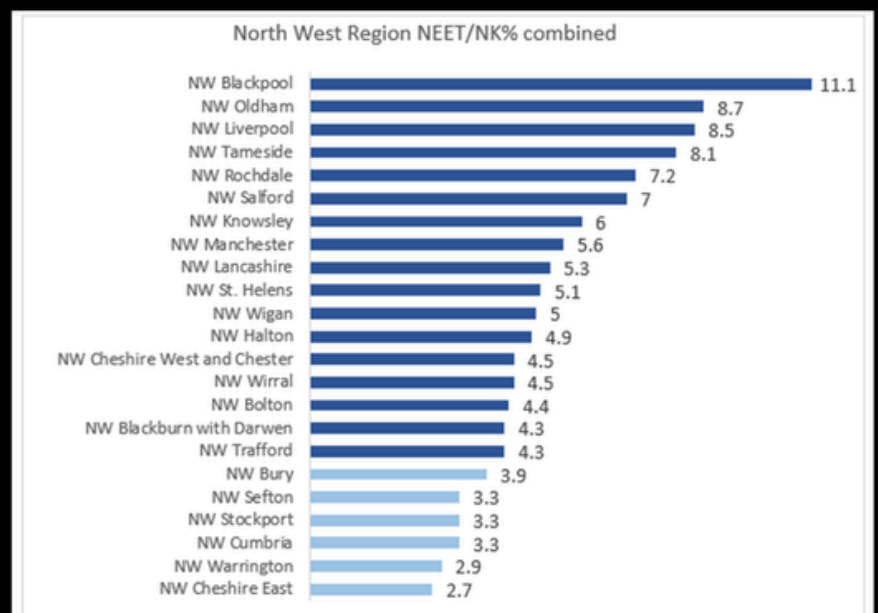
NORTH-WEST REGION NEET/NK% COMBINED

The chart presents a comparative of the percentage of 16/17 young olds who are Not in Education, Employment or training (NEET) or whose activity status is Not Known (NK) in the North West region of England.

Blackpool area has the most significant combined NEET/NK% of **11.1%**, followed by **Oldham** area with NEET/NK% of **8.7%**.

Warrington and **Cheshire East** areas have the lowest combined NEET/NK% of **2.9%** and **2.7%** respectively compared to areas of North West region of England.

NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training
NK: Not Known
YH: Yorkshire and The Humber
NE: North East
NW: North West

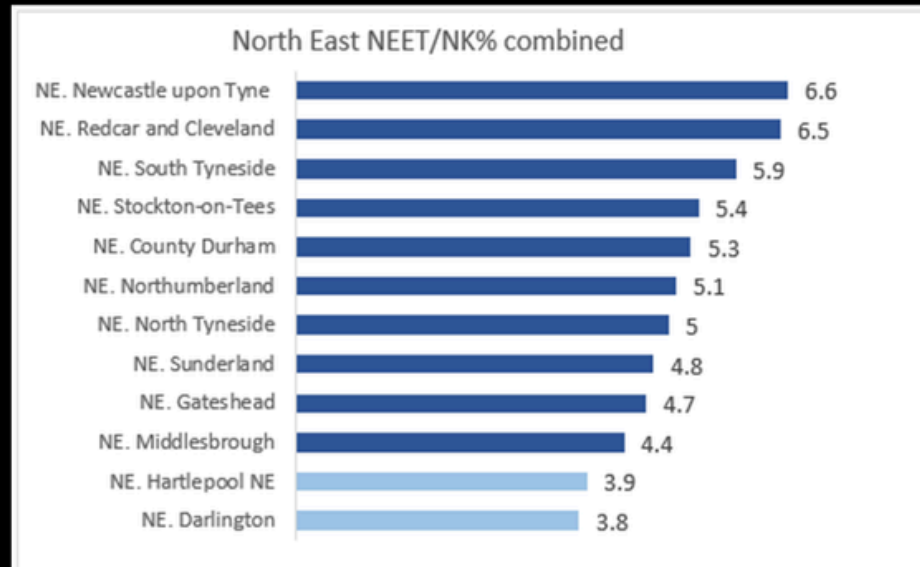


NORTH-EAST NEET/NK% COMBINED

The chart presents the percentage of NEET and NK combined for various areas in the North East of England. It is evident that **Newcastle upon Tyne** and **Redcar & Cleveland** are the areas with the most significant proportions of young people not in education, employment or training and young people whose activities are not known with combined NEET/NK% of **6.6%** and **6.5%** respectively.

Hartlepool and **Darlington** have the lowest combined NEET/NK percentages, suggesting better outcomes in these areas as compared to other areas in the North East with NEET/NK% of **3.9%** and **3.8%** respectively

NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training
NK: Not Known
YH: Yorkshire and The Humber
NE: North East
NW: North West



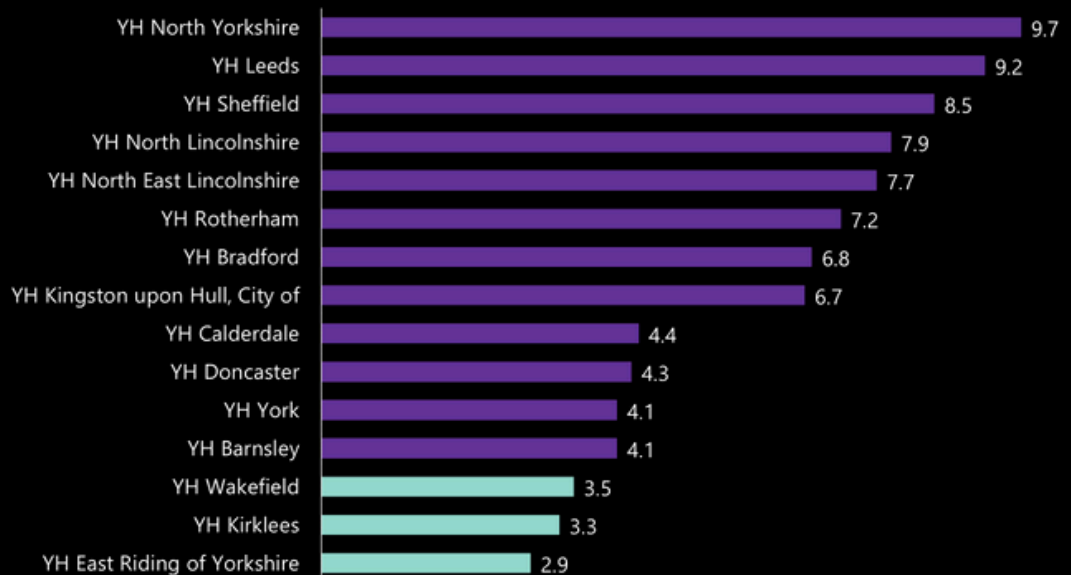
YORKSHIRE NEET/NK PERCENTAGE COMBINED

The chart presents a comparative of the percentage of 16/17 young olds who are Not in Education, Employment or training (NEET) or whose activity status is Not Known (NK) in Yorkshire & Humberside

Leeds area has the most significant combined NEET/NK% of 9.2%, followed by Sheffield area with NEET/NK% of 8.5%.

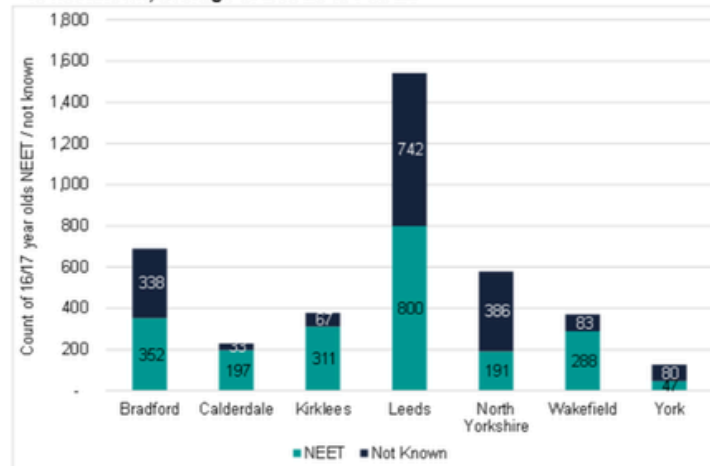
East Riding of Yorkshire has lowest combined NEET/NK% of 2.9%

Yorkshire and the Humber NEET/NK% combined



3,200 young people are NEET/NK in West Yorkshire and 700 in York and North Yorkshire

Figure: Count of 16- and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) or whose activity is not known, average of Dec 23 to Feb 24



There were 3,209 16/17 year olds who were NEET/NK in West Yorks in 23/24, a small reduction from the figure recorded in 22/23 of 3,521

Source: NEET and participation: local authority figures, Department for Education

PROJECTED RISE IN 16-17 DEMOGRAPHIC - LEEDS

Demographic, participation and attainment data

Projected number of young people in the 16-17 tracking cohort

	year 12	year 13	total
2018	7,860	7,958	15,818
2023	9,103	9,079	18,182
2024	9,235	9,197	18,432
2025	9,562	9,332	18,894
2026	9,849	9,653	19,502
2027	9,719	9,934	19,653
2028	10,122	9,812	19,934





ANY QUESTIONS?

Email at
chair@northernskillsnetwork.co.uk
alex.miles@wylp.org.uk