



# SCARRED FOR LIFE?

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**CREATING A *WORKING* FUTURE  
FOR YOUNG WOMEN**

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# WHY WOMEN'S WORKLESSNESS MATTERS – THE CASE FOR URGENT ACTION

**Hundreds of thousands of young women are not earning or learning, but they want to be and they could be.**

Until I agreed to Chair this Inquiry I hadn't realised the scale of the barriers facing them but the evidence is overwhelming and the testimony is stark.

**It has been a great privilege to hear young women's stories.** They convinced me that worklessness will never be reduced if their specific challenges and barriers are not recognised. **These women want to find a way back to education and work, yet many of them believe they have little choice and no voice.** As such, they feel they are easy to ignore.

No government will significantly reduce the number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) if it does not pay close attention to the distinct issues that young women face.

The weight of the evidence summarised in this report – personal testimonies, polling and interviews with those working with young people who are NEET, together with previously published literature - demonstrates that young women have insurmountable challenges which prevent them from moving into employment. **And it reveals another stark reality: being NEET damages young women's lives for longer and more profoundly than it does young men's.**

**This is a long-standing and complex problem. It will not be solved overnight but there are steps that can be taken now which would begin to improve the situation. This report provides recommendations for ways in which to improve the situation for this and future generations of young women.**

**Sian Williams**

Chair, Expert Advisory Panel, 'Scarred for Life?' Inquiry

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The following report is the outcome of the 'Scarred for Life?' Inquiry launched by Young Women's Trust in April 2014, which ran until March 2015. Evidence gathered during the first phase of the Inquiry, which ran from April to September 2014, resulted in the publication of the 'Totally Wasted?: The crisis of young women's worklessness' report in September 2014, which is referenced in this report. During the first phase of the Inquiry, a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence was gathered from our target beneficiary group of NEET young women, as well as a range of statutory and voluntary organisations that work with NEET young people. This included commissioning a ComRes poll, interviewing 859 English adults, aged 18-24, not in education, employment or training between the 10th and 28th July, 2014. Polling both male and female NEETs allowed us to distinguish the specific needs and issues that young women face compared to young men. In addition, we carried out 10 focus groups involving 60 women (24 of those women were aged 25-40) in the following locations: Barking; Blackburn; Blackpool; Manchester; Middlesbrough; Sunderland; Newcastle; Birmingham; Canterbury and central London. An online survey was also completed by 90 women. This research provided us with qualitative evidence and personal testimony from young women who are NEET or in low-paid work, presenting the regional differences and issues they face.

The second phase of the Inquiry ran from September 2014 to March 2015. We gathered evidence through a total of 64 interviews with representatives from several different organisations and entities, including: national charities; government agencies; non-departmental

public bodies; employer organisations; Further Education bodies; Work Programme providers; local authorities; regional government departments; think tanks; national employers; and, the Scottish Parliament. The specific needs and issues young women and organisations told us they faced in Phase 1 helped us to identify a range of stakeholders with an interest, expertise and/or responsibility for reducing youth unemployment and/or young people NEET. Each interview was conducted in a similar format whereby questions were asked on the following themes in relation to young people NEET: public data; accountability; advice, support and guidance; and, Further Education. Our analysis and interpretation of the collective responses from these interviews form the basis of the findings and recommendations in this report.

All of the quotes cited in this report derive from our interviews with organisational representatives, or from our research with NEET young women carried out during the first phase of the Inquiry. The quotes have been anonymised due to the sensitive nature of the comments made and allowed for the inclusion of a broad range of opinions and viewpoints. The findings presented in this report also include input from a panel of experts from a range of academic and business backgrounds (see p. 23), as well as representatives from Young Women's Trust's Advisory Panel.

# CREATING A WORKING FUTURE FOR YOUNG WOMEN – IN SUMMARY

**More young women than young men are NEET – 428,000 compared with 310,000 and on average they are NEET for longer – three years compared with two** <sup>1,2</sup>

This difference in the numbers is often dismissed on the false assumption that it can be accounted for by young carers and mothers who do not want to work.

## **The impact is deeper**

Women who have previously been NEET are more likely than those who haven't to be unemployed. They will spend 10 weeks a year on average out of work, compared to eight, and they will earn **17% less** aged 34 than women who haven't been NEET. <sup>2</sup>

Young women are more likely to get stuck in low-paid and/or insecure work – **79%** of those who have only had minimum wage jobs in the last 10 years are women. <sup>3</sup>

In addition, the personal testimonies from young women gathered for this Inquiry highlight the complexity and range of practical and emotional challenges many face, which diminish their self-confidence and lead to feelings of frustration and uselessness. **These young women have told us they feel judged and denigrated.** <sup>4</sup>

**More than half** of young women NEET (**58%**) told us they had been dissuaded from applying for jobs because of a lack of confidence, compared with **44%** of young men NEET. <sup>5</sup>



Lavonne, 24, North London & Leah, 19, Hertfordshire

## Young women have additional challenges.

On average, young women perform better at GCSE, with 62% achieving A\* to C grades including English and Maths compared to 57% for boys. Yet, at the end of compulsory education, **more than 130,000 young women do not reach the target of five GCSEs A\* to C, including English and Maths.**<sup>6</sup>

Even when young women do get the required grades, and in general they have better educational outcomes than their male counterparts, they are still less likely to gain well-paid, secure employment.

After school, **young women are funnelled into a narrower range of training and work options**, sometimes regardless of their qualifications: **61% of female apprentices work in just five sectors**, whilst the same proportion of men work in more than 10 sectors. And the sectors young women work in pay less.<sup>7</sup>

**Young women NEET are more likely than men to be caring for their own children and other family members.**

While some of these carers may be actively seeking work and therefore classed as unemployed, more than **180,000** young women are economically inactive – ie. not considered to be actively seeking work and not able to claim Job Seekers Allowance - because they are 'looking after family' (**60%** of economically inactive young women).<sup>8</sup>

The ComRes poll for this Inquiry suggests that there are twice as many young women, compared to young men, who are NEET and for whom caring for their own children plays an important part in their job search.<sup>5</sup>

It is likely that they will look to their local labour market to fulfil this need – **86%** of young women NEET told Young Women's Trust that having a job close to home is important.<sup>5</sup>

## Nothing seems to have worked to reduce the overall number of young women who are NEET

There has been insignificant change in 14 years. It was **18.8%** of 18-24 year-old women in 2000; in 2014 it was **18.2%**.<sup>1</sup>

# WHAT SHOULD BE DONE - AN OVERVIEW

## Give young women a chance

(Section 1)

Providers of training, advice, guidance and support need to be more effective in getting young women into reasonably paid secure work.

Opportunities for vocational training need to be funded and more accessible for young women up to the age of 25.

Support needs to be provided for young mothers and carers to enable them to work or study.

## Somebody needs to 'own' the problem

(Section 2)

A new Minister for Youth Employment is needed, who should have a comprehensive understanding of the specific hurdles facing young women.

Effective local and regional leadership is needed and should include Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

## Take gender into account

(Section 3)

Detailed NEET data should be published, nationally, regionally and locally.

Local plans should be developed to create jobs, along with services to support young women who are NEET.



Kamara, 18, Southeast London

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## Rosy, London

Many young women have studied health and social care, quite a few have studied beauty but not so many have done mechanics. Rosy has done all three.

Rosy, who is 20 and lives in Surrey, has now returned to studying health and social care. She tried many courses after leaving school because she didn't know what she wanted to do. She gave up learning to be a car mechanic after just two months because she got fed up with being treated as a joke by the young men on the course. "It wasn't an environment I felt comfortable in," says Rosy.

**"Even though I knew some of the answers I didn't put my hand up in case I was wrong and I would look stupid. I didn't want to show myself up for being a girl."**

After leaving the course Rosy was living in a shared house. She was working at Legoland but was told by her key worker to give up the job because she wouldn't be able to claim benefits.

**"I COULDN'T GO OUT AND GET A JOB BECAUSE I WOULDN'T EARN ENOUGH TO PAY MY RENT."**

Rosy believes this fuelled her eating disorder, which saw her spend five months in hospital and that being NEET, which lasted for periods of up to 18 months, also led to anxiety attacks and depression.

**"I literally didn't do anything. I would stay awake until 4 o'clock in the morning, then sleep all day and then do the same thing all over again because there was no structure. It was horrible."**

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## Emalene, Southampton

Emalene was NEET for three months and is still chasing her dream job as a co-ordinator in creative learning despite having a degree in drama and spending evenings and weekends gaining as much experience as she can.

**"I KNEW I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO WORK MY WAY UP FROM THE BOTTOM, BUT I COULDN'T EVEN GET A JOB AT THE BOTTOM. I WASN'T EXPECTING TO HAVE MY DREAM JOB LAND IN MY LAP BUT AT THE SAME TIME I WASN'T EXPECTING TO BE TURNED AWAY FROM PLACES LIKE MCDONALDS."**

Now 24 and living with her mother in Southampton while she saves for her own place, Emalene was told to look for work in care homes. Desperate after having applied for over 150 jobs, she considered doing so but realised it wasn't what she wanted.

Emalene works as a junior administrator for a supply company but has volunteered at a local dance school for six months, done work experience at a youth club and volunteered as secretary of a local arts festival.

**"It can be really tiring at times but if it gets me into my dream job then I'm happy to do it."**

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# 1 GIVE YOUNG WOMEN A CHANCE

**To have a chance to escape being NEET, young women need high quality careers advice, access to quality Further Education which is affordable, and good vocational opportunities including access to a wide range of apprenticeships. Some also need better childcare provision and help with other caring responsibilities.**

## Careers Advice

Much has been written about the need to improve careers advice in schools and it is important that new initiatives are developed and evaluated.<sup>9</sup>

Many young women and organisations we spoke to have been critical of the advice offered to those under 16 and consider that schools have been given an unrealistic challenge as a result of recent changes to how careers advice and guidance is delivered.<sup>10</sup>

The Fabian Society's 'Out of Sight' report found that teachers are being poorly trained to provide careers advice in tutorial periods and assemblies.<sup>11</sup>

**"I DON'T THINK SCHOOLS UNDERSTAND WHAT GOOD CAREERS GUIDANCE LOOKS LIKE."  
(CAREER SERVICES ORGANISATION)**

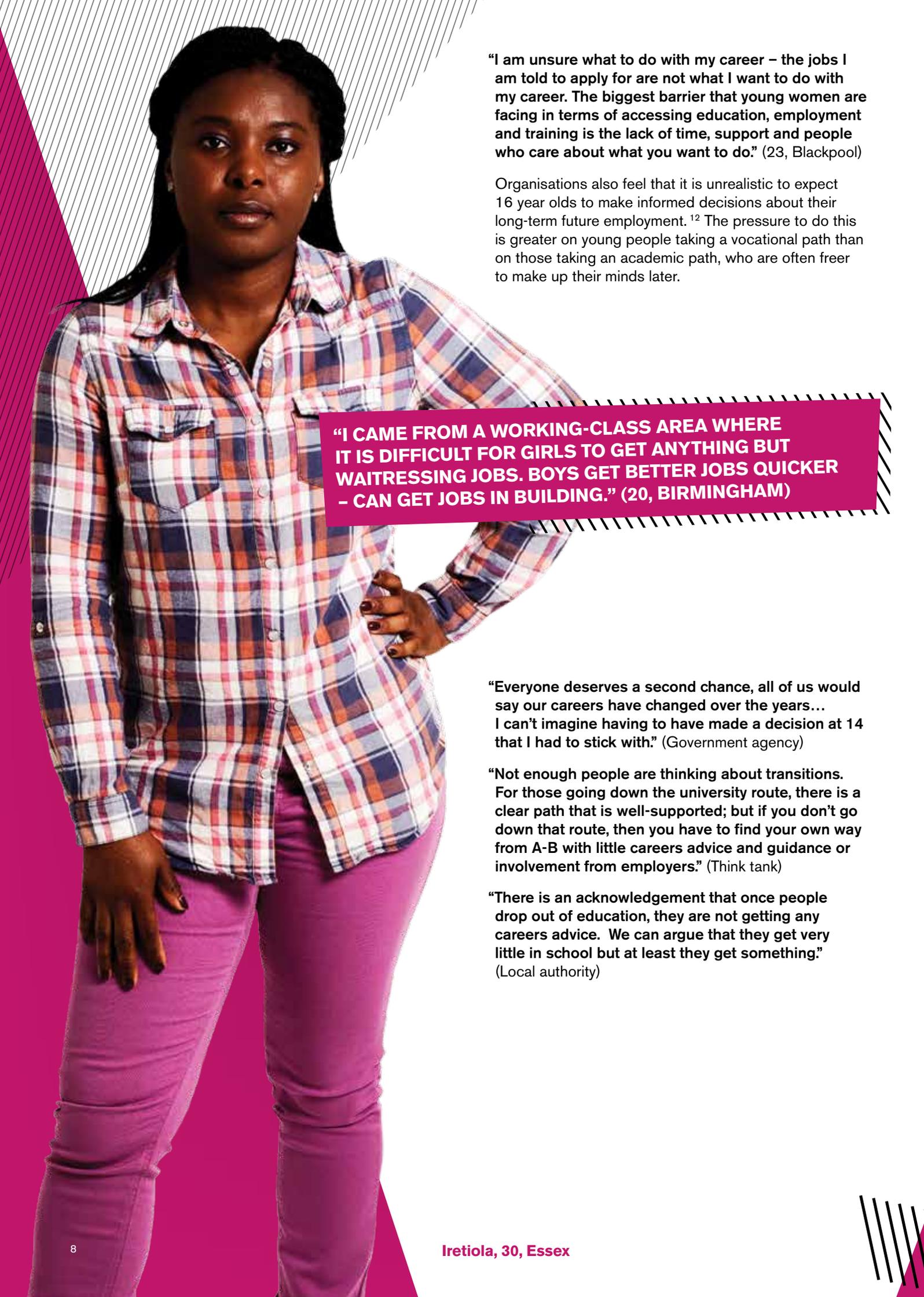
**"In schools we have found that the focus is on moving them onto anything rather than on what they will do as a career."** (Government agency)

But no matter how good school careers advice becomes, many agree that more advice needs to be available to young people in the years after they have left school. The ComRes poll for this Inquiry shows that **41%** of young women NEET consider careers advice would be useful between 18 and 21.<sup>5</sup>

**"There is a gaping hole that has been left now for 18-24 year olds, with inadequate careers advice at school and with Connexions closing."**  
(Work Programme provider)

**Leah, 19, Hertfordshire**





**“I am unsure what to do with my career – the jobs I am told to apply for are not what I want to do with my career. The biggest barrier that young women are facing in terms of accessing education, employment and training is the lack of time, support and people who care about what you want to do.” (23, Blackpool)**

Organisations also feel that it is unrealistic to expect 16 year olds to make informed decisions about their long-term future employment.<sup>12</sup> The pressure to do this is greater on young people taking a vocational path than on those taking an academic path, who are often freer to make up their minds later.

**“I CAME FROM A WORKING-CLASS AREA WHERE IT IS DIFFICULT FOR GIRLS TO GET ANYTHING BUT WAITRESSING JOBS. BOYS GET BETTER JOBS QUICKER – CAN GET JOBS IN BUILDING.” (20, BIRMINGHAM)**

**“Everyone deserves a second chance, all of us would say our careers have changed over the years... I can’t imagine having to have made a decision at 14 that I had to stick with.” (Government agency)**

**“Not enough people are thinking about transitions. For those going down the university route, there is a clear path that is well-supported; but if you don’t go down that route, then you have to find your own way from A-B with little careers advice and guidance or involvement from employers.” (Think tank)**

**“There is an acknowledgement that once people drop out of education, they are not getting any careers advice. We can argue that they get very little in school but at least they get something.” (Local authority)**

**“I FEEL LIKE IT IS TOO LATE FOR AN EDUCATION AS I NOW CAN’T AFFORD ONE.”**  
(21, DONCASTER)

There is a careers service for adults – the National Careers Service (NCS) – but few people use it, or even know about it.

**“It’s the best kept secret. Who knew that we had a NCS that you can ring up? I’ve done careers workshops with 180 young people and when I asked them to put their hands up if they’d heard of the NCS none of them did.”** (National charity)

**“The NCS is not fit for purpose – it does not adequately support young people.”**  
(Employer organisation)

When young women do receive advice, wherever it is from, they report that they are encouraged to pursue a very narrow range of employment options – such as child or adult care, beauty and retail – based on stereotypical gender assumptions.<sup>4</sup> These female-dominated jobs are typically low-paid and insecure compared to those that young men move into, which include jobs in IT, construction and engineering.

Young unemployed people claiming Job Seekers Allowance get their careers advice and guidance from the Job Centre Plus (JCP). Many of the young women we spoke to were critical of advice they received, and organisations also reported a negative attitude towards JCP: <sup>4, 12</sup>

**“Young people refer to JCP as Job Centre Minus – they don’t find it has anything to offer them.”** (National charity)

**“We don’t like careers advice from the Job Centre. The environment is not conducive to sitting down and having a really quality conversation.”** (National charity)

**“The biggest problem I had was with Job Centre - you’re sanctioned for not understanding instructions or being told to go for jobs you couldn’t get to in time (1.5 hours away). I got sanctioned for six months. Many of my mates are facing this now, 80% have been sanctioned for silly reasons.”** – Anon

**“I absolutely hated it, every time I went in there I saw someone different. It was an absolute nightmare.”**  
(23, Blackpool)

## Funding for Training

In order to improve their qualifications or undertake further training, young women need funding - but they are often unaware of what funding opportunities exist, are confused about how to access any potential sources, or worry about how the funding will affect their benefits.<sup>4</sup> For those aged 19 and above, funding may be available in the form of a loan. However, we are concerned that the recent introduction of loans for Further Education do not appear to have reversed the decline in numbers of young women accessing places.<sup>13</sup>

Organisations share this lack of clarity and are unable to offer sound advice.<sup>12</sup>

**“Up to the age of 18, any young person will have free education. However all that has fallen away for over 18s. The SFA is cutting millions of pounds.”**  
(Local authority)

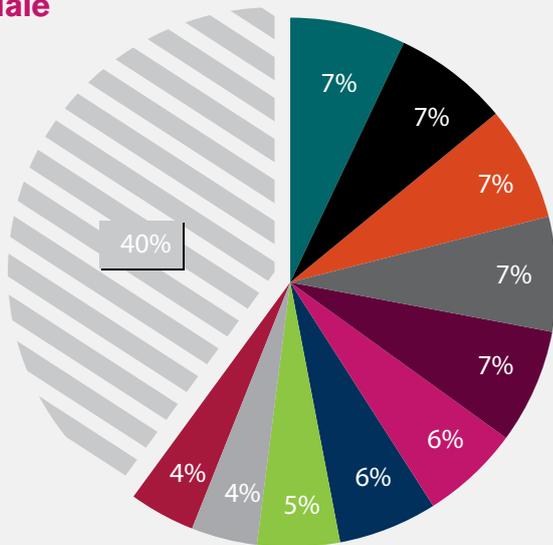
**“If you are 18 plus you will get two thirds of 16-18 funding. If you are 19+, regardless of your situation, you have to get a loan and receive no money from the state.”** (Further Education body)

**“The Government would argue that funding is not an issue as you can receive a loan and if you are low paid you do not have to repay it, but another barrier is having to understand it and it leads to a ‘why bother?’ attitude.”** (Further Education body)

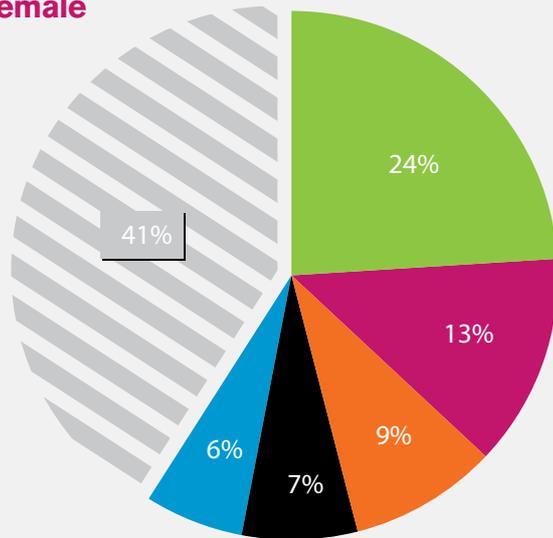
**“I FOUND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO GET THE SUPPORT WHEN LOOKING FOR WORK. I EXPLORED FURTHERING MY SKILLS WITH DIFFERENT COURSES WHEN UNEMPLOYABLE, BUT COULD NOT GET FUNDING.”**  
(23, BLACKPOOL)

Some 61% of female apprentices work in just five sectors, whilst the same proportion of men work in more than 10 sectors.<sup>7</sup>

### Male



### Female



## Apprenticeships

Young women NEET with few or no qualifications, or with qualifications that are not relevant to the work available in their local area, need to be able to access vocational training, including apprenticeships, which lead to secure jobs that pay at least the National Minimum Wage.

Apprenticeships are an important route to skills development and future employment but young women are under-represented in many sectors.

**“There is a national problem not just with engineering but with apprenticeships generally having fewer girls applying.”** (National employer)

**“There are a lot less girls that apply for apprenticeships than boys, and it isn’t just in engineering; across the board there are fewer female applicants.”** (National employer)

**“APPRENTICESHIPS SHOULD BE MADE MORE AVAILABLE TO OLDER AGE GROUPS... IT’S USUALLY 18-20 AND I’M 23.”** (23, BLACKPOOL)

Young women face a number of barriers in accessing apprenticeships, including:

### • Minimum Entry Requirements

One central barrier is that large employers often require apprentices to have a minimum of five A\*-C GCSEs. Yet it is the **130,000** young women lacking these grades who could benefit most from vocational opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

**“We are finding that retakes of GCSEs are problematic for some students, and are causing some to drop out of vocational training. I am concerned that these students may end up as NEETs; once again failed by the educational system.”** (Further Education body)

**“We expect a B in Maths at GCSE and GCSEs at grades A\*-C. The type of opportunities we offer are not entry-level positions. There are obviously NEETs who fulfil those criteria but we do expect people to be fairly work ready when they arrive.”** (National employer)

**“There is no safety net for young people who don’t get Maths and English GCSE. There needs to be a route back in to get these basic qualifications so they could get on to a training scheme or apprenticeship which would give them a route into employment if they didn’t find their path at 16, 18, 19 and so on.”** (Non-governmental organisation)

**“My mental health disrupted my Year 10 and 11 education and I didn’t get any GCSEs and spent a year in limbo not knowing how to re-enter education to retake my courses. There is no information on**

educational establishments that support a wide range of GCSE study for 16s and over once they are out of the school system, unless you have access to money to pay for them.” (18, London)

### • Limited Opportunities

There is evidence of a particular lack of young women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) related apprenticeships.<sup>7</sup> These are more likely to lead to employment opportunities and to higher pay and greater security, than the apprenticeships where young women are better represented - such as beauty or care.<sup>14</sup>

**“Not enough is being done to promote science, engineering and technology. There is no active push to promote it and no way of saying ‘don’t make this a gender specific vocation’. It may be about giving encouragement - saying to a young woman ‘there is a route for you here.’”** (Employer organisation)

**“Currently girls who are NEET are far more likely to want to work in childcare or with animals, but at the moment there is an oversupply of people with those skills. We would like to see that 30% of STEM work is female. It is currently 13% so it would equate to a million more women.”** (Non-governmental organisation)

**“We find that there are old-fashioned perceptions of apprenticeships across the country. We’re keen to break down barriers and encourage more people to look at what our manufacturing facilities are to overcome stereotypical views about apprenticeships.”** (National employer)

**“The right questions are about progression and mobility, particularly in female-dominated sectors, such as childcare and hair and beauty.”** (Employer organisation)

### • Issues with Terms and Conditions

Confusion around the terms and conditions of apprenticeships combined with low pay, can act as a barrier to young women. For example, in the first year of an apprenticeship the statutory rate of pay is £2.73 per hour. This rate is well below the current National Minimum Wage of £6.50 (for 21 and over; £5.13 for 18-20 year olds and £3.79 for under 18s).<sup>15</sup>

Many young people, especially those who are living independently, will be unable to afford to take on an apprenticeship - especially if they themselves have dependants.

**“An apprentice does not receive statutory sick pay if they are ill during their apprenticeship. If you don’t get paid, you can’t eat. It’s kind of bizarre – where is the incentive?”** (Employer organisation)

**“To be on an apprenticeship wage of £2.50 an hour is only doable with parental support. If you don’t have that support it immediately becomes ‘not an option.’”** (National charity)

**“THE LOWEST WAGE FOR APPRENTICES IS NOT ENOUGH AND WILL CONTINUE TO NOT BE ENOUGH.”**  
**(REGIONAL GOVERNMENT)**

### • Job prospects

Organisations point out that in order to encourage young women to take up apprenticeships, it is necessary to demonstrate that permanent work is likely when they complete the apprenticeship.<sup>12</sup>

**“The question we need to be asking ourselves is... are the interventions that we are supplying to support young women actually moving them to things that are long-term sustainable?”** (Employer organisation)

**“Employers can receive an Apprenticeship Grant, which is worth £1,500 paid in two stages with the balance on completion of the apprenticeship term. Employers may decide to take an apprentice on, receive the grant then get rid of them at the end of the 12-month programme and start the whole process again.”** (Employer organisation)

**“Often young women can’t see where they can go from their apprenticeship stage. Young men often think about starting their own business but there isn’t the same engagement with young women. There are still issues that they don’t get the same pay, don’t get the same opportunities and don’t progress at the same rate.”** (Employer organisation)

### How Barclays approaches apprenticeships

Laura left school with no qualifications and struggled to secure employment but today she is starting a career and, in the words of her manager, **“making an incredible contribution.”**

Laura’s story points to what can be achieved with the right approach from an employer; in this case Barclays, who took her on as an apprentice even though she had no GCSEs. Laura joined the branch network to complete a Level 2 qualification, is currently working towards her Level 3 Apprenticeship in Business Administration and joined Barclays’ Early Careers Team seven months ago to progress her career.

Barclays internal analysis found no differences in the performance of apprentices who had GCSEs and those that did not, after two years in the programme. Barclays also works with community partners to ensure that its apprenticeships are open and accessible to all, and then with Capita to ensure that apprentices are fully supported during their time with the company.

## Child Care and other caring responsibilities

Young women NEET are more likely to be economically inactive than unemployed – meaning they are not considered to be actively seeking work and are not able to claim Job Seekers Allowance. Over 300,000 are economically inactive and of those, more than 180,000 give the reason as 'looking after family'.<sup>8</sup>

What is unclear is how many are looking after their own children and how many are caring for other relatives. Indeed, there will also be young women NEET who have these responsibilities but are nevertheless actively looking for work.

The ComRes poll conducted for this Inquiry revealed that, contrary to popular perceptions, only 24% of young women NEET are mothers.<sup>5</sup> But the same poll revealed that, overwhelmingly, young women NEET want to work – 95% said getting a paid job is important to them. This was the same whether or not they were mothers.

**“The biggest barrier to accessing education, employment and training has been having children.”** (22, Newcastle)

**“There are no jobs available which fit with my other responsibilities.”** (22, Norwich)

Some believe that women with children have made a lifestyle choice and imply that this should not be perceived as a hurdle to employment but an expected consequence.

**“We would not recognise a split that there were more women than men NEET. We might acknowledge it culturally, young women make lifestyle choices to be mothers, wives or partners and have children. There might be a poverty issue as a consequence of that. It isn't a barrier, but one of choice.”** (Local authority)

A previous poll for Young Women's Trust showed that 66% of people think that too many young women get pregnant as a means of securing accommodation or benefits.<sup>16</sup>

However, the more recent ComRes poll showed that those young women NEET who are mothers cannot afford the child care which would allow them to further their education or take on an apprenticeship or do a low-paid job.<sup>5</sup> The current government provision of 570 hours a year for 3-4 year olds allows only a few hours' work per week after travel, which itself may be a prohibitive cost.

**“I'm a qualified nursery nurse, but I can only get the National Minimum Wage. I'd be paying the same in childcare costs as I'm earning.”** (19, Birmingham)

Young mothers may have other concerns too, which prevent them from seeking work.

**“There's a growing distrust of public services – young mothers, young people with caring responsibilities and others that are unable to work are often put off going to Job Centre Plus as they are worried that if they want employment support, they will face cuts to their benefits.”** (Think tank)



**“IF YOU HAVE A CHILD, YOU DO NEED TO FIND SOMETHING THAT CAN PAY ALL YOUR BILLS, NOT JUST A QUICK FIX.”** (24, LONDON)



# WHAT SHOULD BE DONE - IN DETAIL

1. All providers of information, advice and guidance must be trained and encouraged to deliver careers advice supporting young women to retrain or to enter jobs which are available locally, are secure and pay sufficiently. Providers should be measured against successful delivery of this.
2. The National Careers Service (NCS) should be widely publicised, particularly in areas with high numbers of young people who are NEET. NCS should place much greater emphasis on supporting young women who are currently economically inactive. Intensive, personalised and tailored information and guidance should be available.
3. Public funding should be made available to enable young people to train or retrain in Levels 1-4 in subjects which tally with work that is available locally. This should be available up to at least age 25.
4. Employers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) industries should share best practice in supporting and enabling young women to enter occupations where they are currently under-represented.
5. In order to make apprenticeships accessible to those with no qualifications and those without financial resources, it is essential to:
  - a. Remove the formal qualifying criteria for apprenticeships as a matter of course, so that young people who do not achieve five A\*-C GCSEs at 16 are no longer denied access to quality work and training.
  - b. Abolish the minimum apprenticeship wage and simplify the National Minimum Wage so that everyone working or undertaking an apprenticeship over the age of 18 receives the same minimum rate of pay.
6. Government should commit to extend the provision of free child care so that young mothers can afford to study or work part time/full time. This should include extending the Care to Learn scheme from the current age of 20 to those aged up to 25. Also, government should make the Carer's Allowance available for those who are studying.

# 2 SOMEBODY NEEDS TO 'OWN' THE PROBLEM

**Organisations expressed significant concern that there is no clear accountability on a national, regional or local level for the reduction of young people's worklessness.<sup>11</sup> And when it comes to young women there is a lack of monitoring of what happens to them.**

Whilst several ministers have elements of this responsibility within their portfolio, no one has sole responsibility for actively increasing youth employment overall, let alone specifically addressing the on-going crisis for young women. Three different departments – the Department for Work & Pensions, Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills – are each responsible for different elements of employability and training for young people.

**"There is an accountability vacuum really, where you have so many people involved, no one is responsible."** (National charity)

**"It isn't just a lack of accountability. It's worse than that. Certain policies in certain departments actually act against helping young people. It's not just that there is a gap – adverse behaviours are being created."** (Local authority)

**"Accountability has created problems for us because we are contracted by certain authorities – we have to reach Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) goals which aren't necessarily the local authority's goals."** (Work Programme provider)

On a regional level, organisations consider Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have a lot of potential to promote growth locally, but there is a lack of clarity about their role and priorities.<sup>12</sup>

**"Guidelines from central government on what LEPs are supposed to achieve, as well as what powers they have would be really helpful."** (National charity)

**"Government has devolved money to these regions through LEPs, they need to be held to account. They need to be asked how they are devising their policies. Is it based on data or conjecture?"** (Employer organisation)

**"Every LEP should analyse the issue of women NEET in their locality. The targets have to make sense to people because local needs differ completely."** (Further Education body)

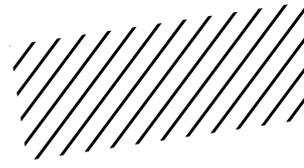
**"IT WOULD BE HUGELY HELPFUL TO US - TO HAVE SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTANDS THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE KNOCK ON EFFECTS AND BENEFITS OF EMPLOYMENT IN TERMS OF FINANCIAL SECURITY, THEIR FUTURE, THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AND THE REDUCTION IN OFFENDING."** (NATIONAL CHARITY)

# WHAT SHOULD BE DONE - IN DETAIL



1. A Minister should be established within central government with responsibility for overall youth policy, including youth (un)employment and an understanding of the particular problems facing young women. Lessons could be learnt from the Scottish Government's Minister for Youth & Women's Employment.
2. The Minister should make it a priority to find solutions to the many hurdles facing young women wanting to work, which include: childcare and other caring responsibilities (especially for those in low-paid jobs); transport costs; low pay; as well as the range of available jobs in the local labour market. Whilst some of these hurdles apply to young men as well, they impact on a far greater number of young women.
3. The Government should encourage and facilitate LEPs (Local Enterprise Partnerships) to increase young people's employment by:
  - a. Producing improved guidance setting out its national priorities for young people's employment
  - b. Giving preference to funding bids from LEPs that demonstrate positive engagement with the issue of young people's employment, with particular regard to young women's employment.
  - c. Disseminate information about local initiatives that encourage employers (especially small and medium-sized) to recruit and train young workers.
  - d. Establishing more careful monitoring of outcomes with respect to the gender balance

# 3 TAKE GENDER INTO ACCOUNT



**If effective action is to be taken to address the number of young women who are NEET, now and in the future, more information needs to be widely available. This needs to clarify how many young women and young men are NEET in each local area, the characteristics of these young people and the particular challenges they face.**

**“I think we need proper resources, but also proper acknowledgement of the barriers to employment in the North compared to that in the South.”**  
(Local authority)

It is clear that organisations, even some of those working directly with NEETs, are not aware that there are more young women than young men who are NEET and the fact that this has been the case for so long.<sup>12</sup>

**“I know that I’ve had this belief that young boys really struggle and would assume that NEET affects them disproportionately, so to hear that isn’t the case shocks me.”** (Government body)

**“We wouldn’t recognise a split that there were more women than men NEET.”** (Local authority)

**“We have mentioned boys more than girls. We have not done much on gender or ethnicity - we tend to talk more generally. We have done bits that mention white working class boys, but not so much on girls.”**  
(Think tank)

At local authority and regional level there is a lack of data on NEETs broken down by age, gender, disability, race or socio-economic status.

**“A big question for us is where are these NEET populations? We know they are on Job Seeker’s Allowance but they are not coming through. Areas we know where we have large NEET populations, such as Hackney, are often areas where we are working with the fewest NEETs.”**  
(Work Programme provider)

Locally, data about young people who are economically inactive is lacking. Some **70%** of 18-24 year olds who are economically inactive are women, so it is vital that there is a greater understanding about the hurdles facing this group.<sup>8</sup>

**“I WOULD 100% SUPPORT THE ARGUMENT THAT SOPHISTICATED INFORMATION IS LACKING ON THE NEEDS OF NEETS.”**  
(FURTHER EDUCATION BODY)



**“The problem with the ‘unknown’ NEETs is that they are the least likely to know that there is support out there for them.”** (Local authority)

**“The term NEET implies a uniformity, which simply does not exist. Young women in this group need totally different support from those waiting to hear back from potential employers, or those on a gap year, teenage mums.”** (Non-departmental public body)

**“When young women have babies, they are disguised from the figures - they no longer become ‘unemployed’, which means the government doesn’t have to worry about them or even collect that data.”** (Educational organisation)

**“I think part of young women being ignored is that they are not actually unemployed, they’re not actively seeking or available for work - the labour market regime and education system are focused on those that come into contact with JCP and those that are easy to find and easily fit into pre-set categories.”** (Government body)

If data about the extent and the range of reasons for being NEET was more widely available to public, private and voluntary sector bodies and consortia, such as the LEPs, could come up with local plans to address the particular needs of young women in their catchment areas. Many organisations said the lack of data directly impacted their ability to provide effective and tailored services.<sup>12</sup>

**“The problem with the Government’s way of doing things is that it sees a homogenous group that it labels ‘NEETs’, then it thinks there are homogenous solutions.”** (National charity)

**“If we had a better picture of some of the volumes of and needs of young women, it would help drive additional services we’ve got and inform which employers we would work with. It could potentially enable us to tailor services better – we only get information currently when people are referred.”** (Work Programme provider)

**“If there was funding we would be interested in focusing on young women NEET, but we are very much at the behest of the Department of Work & Pensions and commissioners.”** (Work Programme provider)

**“How can you plan if you don’t know where they are? We know there are a million unemployed, there are young people who are NEET, 70% are young women, but where are they and what are we doing about them?”** (Employer organisation)

**“Providers are affected by referral flows that are not what they expected. They won’t be given predictions of who is coming in split by gender. Actually, they are given very little information about the starting point of these people.”** (Employer organisation)

**“THERE ARE A LOT OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE ECONOMICALLY INACTIVE, THEY ARE NOT ON BENEFITS AND THEREFORE ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR ANY SUPPORT. THAT IS QUITE A CONCERNING GROUP.”** (EMPLOYER ORGANISATION)



# WHAT SHOULD BE DONE? IN DETAIL

1. Data on NEETs, unemployment and economic inactivity should be collated nationally by one lead agency and published by age, gender and ethnicity in a way that allows consistent comparisons between local authorities and regions and which covers the whole age range 16-24.

This lead agency should guide and support local authorities in collecting data on 16-24 year olds who are workless. This data will allow relevant local interventions and support inter-agency working.

This will require an improvement in the data currently collected on 16-18 year olds, as many local authorities have high numbers of young people in this age range who leave school and for whom they have no subsequent data; the “destination unknown”.

2. Official publications and statistical announcements should no longer have a narrow focus on ‘youth unemployment’, which only includes those who are ‘available for work’ for a certain number of hours per week and/or are claiming Job Seekers’ Allowance.

Instead, the public should be informed about the broader picture of young worklessness, which will include those who are currently ‘economically inactive’ (the majority of whom are women). In this way, the numbers of those working will be compared to the total number of those not working.

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## Jenny, London

Jenny, 23, was doing an unpaid internship with a marketing agency to gain experience until the Job Centre Plus advisor told her that she had to stop because she was deemed unavailable for work. After giving the agency warning, she gave up the internship, only for the agency to then go back on its promise to pay her expenses and Jenny found herself £120 out of pocket.

After another period of several months being NEET she took a temporary retail job over Christmas which paid £8.08 an hour but this had an impact on benefits and Jenny found the work, until 8pm each day, and the long bus journey to and from the store, exhausting and stressful.

Jenny's mother died while she was at university but had become ill when Jenny was only 14. She feels that from that point on she had to grow up really quickly and doesn't feel like she has ever had adults guiding her.

**“Being NEET has knocked my confidence so much,”** says Jenny. **“Uni finished and I just had nothing. I didn't realise how low and down on myself I had got and it is only now that I am starting to try and get out of that, with absolutely no help from the Job Centre Plus and no help from any careers guidance people at all.”**

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## Chloe, Doncaster

Chloe has been in and out of being NEET since she was 16. She is 22 now and has just started an Introduction to Counselling course that she hopes will eventually lead to a more settled life, and a happy and healthy one.

The course costs £240 for ten weekly three-hour sessions but then she will get to do Level 2 for free. She would love to have done a full-time NVQ but she wouldn't have got funding.

Chloe lives with her grandparents in Doncaster, where opportunities are few and far between - even more so for women. Counselling is close to what she wants to do and would definitely be an improvement on the minimum wage jobs she has done in warehouses and call centres, which aggravated her mental health issues.

But Chloe has had to work this out for herself. “Pitiful” careers advice at school was merely a computer programme that suggested she would be suited to “picking and packing” and she felt as though someone she spoke to at the local college couldn't wait to get rid of her.

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## Sophie, Surrey

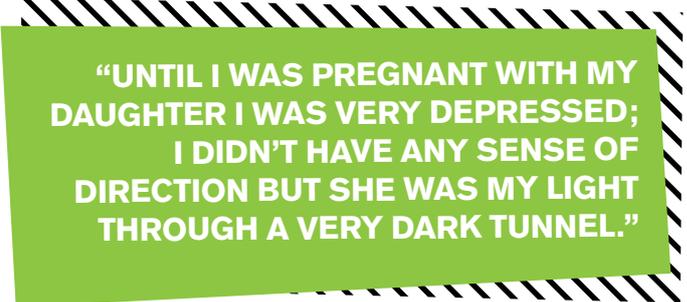
Sophie was NEET for about four months before doing her science degree. She dropped out of this for two months, received no support or advice and did jobs paying below the National Minimum Wage - even unpaid ‘work experience’ at a discount shop and a warehouse.

After finishing her degree, Sophie was again NEET for eight months and sent 150 emails looking for work experience. Only two were successful but one led to an offer of a three-month paid internship and after that to the chance of a job. Then Sophie revealed her secret; she was pregnant. “Okay, maybe not,” said the employer.

Months later when Sophie, who is 26 and lives in north London, had another interview and was asked to name her biggest achievement she said it was her children. The tone of the interview suddenly changed, says Sophie, and the employer even confirmed in feedback that she hadn't got the job because she had a family.

Even though it made her feel guilty, Sophie didn't mention her two children when she went for another job, and was successful. She works for a different employer now, as a clinical trials research officer.

**“It was one of the darkest periods and I don't know how I survived it,”** she says. But having a family, even though she knew she and her husband would have to cope by themselves, had a positive impact:



**“UNTIL I WAS PREGNANT WITH MY DAUGHTER I WAS VERY DEPRESSED; I DIDN'T HAVE ANY SENSE OF DIRECTION BUT SHE WAS MY LIGHT THROUGH A VERY DARK TUNNEL.”**

# CONCLUSIONS

**The crisis of worklessness is costing young women dearly and it is costing our society too – both now and in the long term.**

Young women NEET cost the economy as much as **£2.6 billion** per annum.<sup>2</sup> Employers are deprived of the skills and talents of nearly half a million young women.

Young women cannot contribute fully to society because of the barriers placed in their way, which will only be removed when there is a step-change in the way that young women's worklessness is addressed. This includes finding ways for young parents and carers to work or study.

Without this new approach we will continue to prevent young women from working and studying now, and also prevent them from gaining the skills and experience which will allow them to do so later.

Being NEET damages young women's well-being now and in the future. They are at greater risk of mental and physical health problems, and they are more likely than others to be unemployed or in low-paid and insecure jobs in the future. Their confidence and optimism deteriorates and they are prone to a vicious cycle of despondency.

The impact of this damage cannot be understated. It is felt not only by the young women themselves; research has shown a negative impact of living in low income households on children's health, educational attainment and future job prospects.<sup>17</sup> Failing to support young women now, means risking condemning them and also future generations.<sup>18</sup>

This situation has been overlooked for too long and it is now imperative that urgent action is taken to address the challenges young women NEET face in moving into quality paid work, otherwise they will be 'scarred for life'.

## What happens next?

Over the next 12 months, Young Women's Trust will be:

**Campaigning for the implementation of the recommendations in this report;**

**Launching a campaign to improve apprenticeships for young women;**

**Continuing the roll-out of the Work It Out online and telephone coaching service aimed at supporting young women to gain confidence and employability;**

**Challenging negative perceptions people have about young women trapped by the cycle of low pay and no pay.**

You can find out more at

**[www.youngwomenstrust.org](http://www.youngwomenstrust.org)**



# THANK YOU

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UK Commission for Employment & Skills  
Unite the Union  
Women in Science and Engineering (WISE)  
Young People's Support Foundation  
Youth Employment UK

## YOUNG WOMEN

Afeefa, Amy, Anita, Candice, Cassie, Chantelle, Charlotte, Chishala, Clare, Clare, Clio-Louise, Daisy, Danielle, Debbie, Demi, Denesha, Emily, Emine, Ewa, Georgia, Hayley, Jada, Jamie Leigh, Jessie, Joy, Katie, Kaytlin, Kiegan, Kimberlin, Krystal, Lani, Lauren, Leanne, Leanne, Louise, Mariam, Mariam, Michaela, Nadal, Nadia, Nana, Nasira, Neketa, Nkechi, Noora, Paige, Patrizze, Sara, Sarah, Sarah, Shannon, Stacey, Suhayla, Tiyana-Monique, Vanessa

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## Funders:



The Barrow Cadbury Trust is an independent charitable foundation, committed to bringing about socially just change. We provide grants to grassroots community groups and campaigns working in deprived communities in the UK, with a focus on Birmingham and the Black Country. We also work with researchers, think tanks and government, often in partnership with other grant-makers, to overcome the structural barriers to a more just and equal society.

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, NEET statistics quarterly brief: October to December 2014

<sup>2</sup> Acevo, 2012, 'The Crisis we cannot afford' - [http://www.cesi.org.uk/sites/default/files/event\\_downloads/ACEVO\\_report.pdf](http://www.cesi.org.uk/sites/default/files/event_downloads/ACEVO_report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Resolution Foundation, 2013, Minimum Stay,

<sup>4</sup> Young women interviewed for this Inquiry - see methodology on page 2. A list of young women we spoke to is included at the end of the report

<sup>5</sup> ComRes survey carried out for this Inquiry

<sup>6</sup> GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gcse-and-equivalent-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2014>

<sup>7</sup> Skills Funding Agency, Apprenticeship Starts by framework, level and gender <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-libraryapprenticeships>

<sup>8</sup> Labour Force Survey, July-September 2014

<sup>9</sup> E.g. The Chartered, Institute for Personnel & Development (2014), CSJ (2013), and Careers England 2014)

<sup>10</sup> Commons Standard Library Note- Careers Service- <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN06446/careers-services>

<sup>11</sup> Fabian Society, 2014, Out of Sight, [http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/OutOfSight\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/OutOfSight_WEB.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Organisations interviewed for this Inquiry - see methodology on page 2, organisations are listed at end of the report

<sup>13</sup> Skills Funding Agency, FE data library: Further education and skills, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-further-education-and-skills>

<sup>14</sup> Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2012, Hidden Talents: Skills Mismatch Analysis <http://www.cesi.org.uk/publications/hidden-talents-skills-mismatchanalysis>

<sup>15</sup> National Minimum Wage Rates, March 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>

<sup>16</sup> Populus Data Solutions poll of 1067 member of the public, carried out in November 2013

<sup>17</sup> Prince's Trust Youth Index 2015, [https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/pdf/Youth\\_Index\\_2015\\_Report.PDF](https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/pdf/Youth_Index_2015_Report.PDF)

<sup>18</sup> Artazcoz et al (2005), Social inequalities in the impact of flexible employment on different domains of psychosocial health. *Journal Epidemiology and Community Health* 2005; 59:761-767



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