# Young People and the Milburn Review: Briefing for Parliamentarians

This briefing supports parliamentarians to engage with complex debates about young people who are not in education, employment or training. As a national charity, Turn2us offers support to navigate the social security system through our **information tools**.

Drawing on evidence and lived experience, this briefing explains the purpose of different benefits, the barriers young people face when accessing the social security system, and what practical solutions are needed.

# What is NEET?

**NEET refers to young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training. Figures from August 2026 show almost one million young people are NEET[1].**

### What is the issue with rising numbers of young people who are NEET?

The government has recognised that rising youth unemployment is both an economic and social challenge.

Young people who are out of work, education or training are less able to contribute to the economy, are more likely to see their future earnings affected, and may need greater support later on in life.

But the greatest impact is on young people themselves — their confidence, health, relationships and hopes for the future. Too many have been let down by systems that should help them build financial security.

### What is the role of social security in tackling this problem?

Our social security system should provide stability for us all, helping us avoid financial crisis as we recover from ill-health or look for work. Without an adequate safety net, periods of transition — such as leaving education and looking for a first job — can increase the risk of financial insecurity for young people. This puts additional pressure on households already living in poverty, making it harder to find work and potentially harming their health.

Social security should also act as a gateway to wider employment support, giving young people the stability and confidence they need to find work and progress towards their goals.

[1] ONS (2026) Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) - Office for National Statistics

# What are the challenges young people are facing through the social security system?

## Young people are missing out on vital financial support

Nearly half of those who are NEET are not accessing social security[2]. This could be down to stigma, system complexity or lack of awareness. Stigma often discourages people from accessing the support they need to avoid financial crisis.

Not all young people will need financial support, however, many will, and having financial security is essential for finding work. Young people need to be able to afford appropriate work clothing, travel or equipment and finding a job can require taking risks — moving to a new area, leaving home or retraining for a different role. DWP research found that limited income or family support also restricts some young people's ability to take unpaid placements or cover the cost of training[3].

## Employment support can feel out of reach

Many young people have described difficulties around not knowing where to start when looking for work, often due to a lack of awareness of available employment support. Finding work can feel overwhelming without clear and accessible guidance on how to search for opportunities or navigate the job market.

## The threat of sanctions reduces trust

Turn2us research found that 64% of claimants feel the system is trying to "catch them out"[4]. Prescriptive conditionality and sanctions treat people like children, reduce confidence and push people into financial crisis.

### How do sanctions work?

If claimants fail to meet their conditions, such as completing 35 hours of work search, they can be sanctioned — meaning their payments are stopped for a set period until they re-engage. In May 2026, 5.2% of claimants subject to work-search conditions were sanctioned[5], with young people disproportionately likely to be sanctioned[6].

Although sanctions are not frequently used, Turn2us research found the impact that sanctions have on positioning social security as punitive and stigmatising is substantial[7]. The focus on checking that claimants are meeting their claimant commitment, means the threat of sanctions hangs over every engagement, increasing fear of the DWP, reducing trust in work coaches and making it harder to effectively engage.

### Do sanctions support people into work?

Sanctions create distrust in the system[8], worsen physical and mental health[9] and lead to financial debt[10]. Sanctions therefore do not support people into work.

DWP's own evidence shows they do not increase employment overall and where sanctions do push people into work, it is often into lower-paid and less secure jobs[11].

## Young people who have engaged with the Jobcentre say:

"it's up to you and nobody's there to help you"

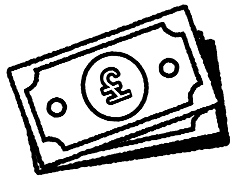
"I found with the Jobcentre...there's not much aspirational thinking. It's just about getting someone in employment, no matter what it is"

"a lot of times it feels like you're reporting to someone and they're there just to see, are you doing what you need to or do we need to give you any penalties"

"your confidence or morale in that actual place and like the shame around sometimes being unemployed on benefits or at a job centre or Universal Credit can affect finding work"

[2]LSE Blogs (2025). Three myths about NEETs in the UK. Three myths about NEETs in the UK. [3]DWP (2026). Qualitative research with NEET 16 to 24 year olds not currently claiming health or disability benefits. [4]Turn2us (2025). From stigma to support. [5]DWP (2026) Benefit sanctions statistics to May 2026. Benefit Sanctions statistics to May 2026 - GOV.UK. [6]Rochow, T (2025): Young people's experiences of multiple benefit sanctions: secondary analysis of qualitative longitudinal data, Journal of Youth Studies. [7]Turn2us (2025). From Stigma to Support. Stigma to support: Rebuilding trust in our social security system | Turn2us. [8]Davies, S, Evans, J and Cross, K (2025) Stigma in the System, Personal Finance Research Centre, University of Bristol. [9]Z2K (2024) Security not sanctions: Making Universal Credit work for seriously ill and disabled people. [10]Public Law Project and Central England Law Centre (2025) Sanctionable failures: Universal Credit's failing sanctions regime and the harm it causes. [11]Department for Work and Pensions (2023) The impact of benefit sanctions on employment outcomes. assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148982/the-impact-of benefit-sanctions-on-employment-outcomes.pdf.

# How do health and disability benefits support people?



Health and disability benefits help people manage their health, stay independent, and have the financial security they need to live with dignity.

A lot of the social security debate around young people who are NEET has focused on health and disability benefits.

### The rise in ill-health and disability

It is important to recognise there has been a rise in ill health and disability, which has been driven by several structural factors. This includes insecure housing, long NHS waiting lists, low pay, rising living costs, and a lack of accessible, secure work.

Focusing solely on the rising cost of some parts of the social security system can fuel public disapproval and exacerbate shame for those accessing support.

Evidence shows that talking about social security as an investment in the future increases support for the system[12]. This helps people to access the support they need, avoiding higher downstream costs in healthcare and crisis support.

### What is PIP?

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is additional income for people who have care or mobility needs as a result of a disability. PIP is not designed to cover the cost of essentials or as a poverty alleviator.

- **The daily living component** - supports with daily activities
- **The mobility component** - supports with mobility needs

It is not means tested and the amount you receive depends on how many points you score in the PIP test for daily living and the PIP test for mobility.

### What is Universal Credit Health (LCWRA)?

If a health condition or disability limits how much work you can do for longer than 28 days, they may need to have a Work Capability Assessment (WCA). The assessment uses a list of examples of everyday activities and tasks, known as descriptors.

You're sent a decision afterwards that says if you:

- are fit for work (also known as 'capable for work')
- have limited capability for work (LCW), but need to prepare to work in the future
- have limited capability for work and work-related activity (LCWRA)
- have LCWRA and have a severe, lifelong health condition

If assessed as having LCWRA you are awarded the health element of Universal Credit. This is intended to support living costs, recognising that being seriously ill or disabled increases the risk of falling into poverty because it limits how much people can earn through work.

Whilst in the LCWRA group you do not have mandatory conditions to search for work. However, the government has rolled out wider voluntary support for this group. The Universal Credit (UC) health element also makes trying work more affordable, through its 'work allowance'.

### What is conditionality?

Conditionality refers to the obligations placed on claimants to take part in certain work-related activities, such as job searching or training to get your benefit entitlement. The UK social security system expects claimants to do everything that can reasonably be expected to find work or prepare for work in the future as a condition of receiving support, otherwise you are at risk of sanctions.

### Who is subject to conditionality?

People who are expected to engage in, look for, or prepare for work.

### Who is not subject to conditionality?

- Those with severe disabilities or terminal illnesses
- Full-time carers
- LCWRA group - no current prospect of undertaking work or work-related activities

It is important to recognise there has been a rise in ill health and disability, which has been driven by several structural factors.

[12]Together for social security (2026). together-for-social-security-messaging-guide.pdf

## What could change about health and disability benefits for young people?

### Cut to Universal Credit Health

Last year in the Pathways to work green paper, the government suggested cutting Universal Credit Health for under 22s[13].

Restricting young people's entitlement to the UC health element or other social security support would cause serious harm to disabled young people and their carers. Analysis by Scope shows that removing the UC health element would leave more than nine in ten affected young people in poverty, almost doubling the poverty rate for this group[14].

Rather than cutting support, the government should invest in what works: early intervention, high-quality employment support, a stronger Right to Try Guarantee, specialist support in Jobcentres, and action to address pressures on mental health and SEND services[15].

### Increased Conditionality

The interim Milburn Report stated that too many young people are being left disconnected from the system, raising the prospect of reforms that increase conditionality for sick and disabled young people.

Too often, sick and disabled young people on Universal Credit are left without support and disconnected from opportunities for education, skills development, volunteering and paid work. However, the UK's conditionality and sanctions system stands out internationally for its excessively punitive approach.

Extending this to many more disabled young people would be ineffective and harmful, pushing them further away from support and employment.

Many disabled young people have complex barriers to work and need work coach and employment support that is collaborative, personalised and holistic instead of prescriptive and stringent.

[13]Department for Work and Pensions (2025) Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working. [14]Action for Children et al. (March 2026) Protecting the Universal Credit health element for disabled young people. [15]Action for children, et.al (2026) Protecting the Universal Credit health element for disabled young people

# What do we want to see?

**The future prosperity of our country depends on more people having a decent chance now. It relies on our social security system providing us with the security we all need to thrive.**

## To create a trusted and effective social security system, we are calling for the government to:

**1. Provide financial security alongside employment support**

- Encourage take-up of social security among 16–24-year-olds so they receive financial and employment support whilst looking for work.
- Ensure government narrative promotes Universal Credit as a gateway to employment support and does not stigmatise young people accessing social security.

**2. Design Jobcentres to lead with trust, not suspicion**

- Ensure work coaches and assessors have the capacity, time and training to build trust and understand each claimant's unique ambitions and challenges.
- Move from surveillance and punishment to collaboration, focusing on voluntary sanction-free engagement with employment support that nurtures people's confidence, ambitions and hope for the future[15].

**3. Retain the Universal Credit Health element for young people 24 and under**

- This support contributes towards the financial security of young people who are unable to work and where possible, helps them move towards work in the future.
- Cutting this support risks worsening physical and mental health whilst increasing financial insecurity[16].

**4. Co-produce a charter for social security**

- Turn2us is calling on the UK Government to develop a principle-based charter for social security, co-produced with people with lived-experience of financial insecurity.

**5. Adopt a pro-social security narrative alongside improvements to the system**

- Use the Turn2us 'Talking about Social Security' guide to talk about the positive role that social security plays in people's lives, alongside policy and practice changes that can improve people's experience of the system.
- When we create a shift from blame to support, we can foster trust and shore up people's faith in public services. This will lay the foundations for a system that is approachable, respectful, and sustainable.

**Encourage take-up of social security among 16–24-year-olds so they receive financial and employment support whilst looking for work.**

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[16]Turn2us (2026). From stigma to support. [16]Action for children, et.al (2026) Protecting the Universal Credit health element for disabled young people