

Young People Neither in Education, Employment, nor Training

Analysis of the Trend in Wales¹

June 06, 2026

¹ Government published statistics have been used for this analysis. The data on NEET can be found on <https://www.gov.wales/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-neet-2025-html#203052>

1. Executive Summary

Wales' construction and retrofit sectors are facing a critical turning point which is threatening our ability to deliver the affordable homes Wales needs.

To meet demand, Wales needs 2,200 construction workers each year, yet the workforce is shrinking by around 300 annually². In the retrofit sector, current labour supply meets just 87% of demand. This is projected to plummet to 25% over the next decade.³

At the same time, Wales is experiencing a sharp rise in youth disengagement. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) increased to 17% in the year ending December 2025, while the estimated number of young people who were NEET increased to 56,800 in 2025 from 38,300 in 2024 – a staggering 48.3% increase.

Comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom indicates that the recent deterioration is specific to Wales. The government statistics also highlight persistent inequalities in NEET outcomes. Disabled young people remain substantially more likely to be NEET than their non-disabled peers, with disparities becoming more pronounced among those aged 19 to 24.

With more skilled tradespeople leaving the industry than joining, this risks compounding the housing emergency - exacerbating the impact the shortage of social homes has on health, wealth, and life opportunities across our nation.

But this is also an opportunity. By aligning our housing goals with a bold skills strategy, we can turn a national emergency into a wave of opportunity for the tens of thousands of NEET young people in Wales.

The increase in NEETs, and the persistence of inequalities within them, highlight the importance of meaningful policy attention to improving transitions into education, employment and training, alongside measures that address the structural barriers experienced by disadvantaged groups.

A National Construction Skills strategy can align housing associations' economic contribution and training provision with the capacity of the Further Education sector and private supply chain, providing long term certainty and a clear roadmap to move out of the housing emergency into a period of housing recovery.

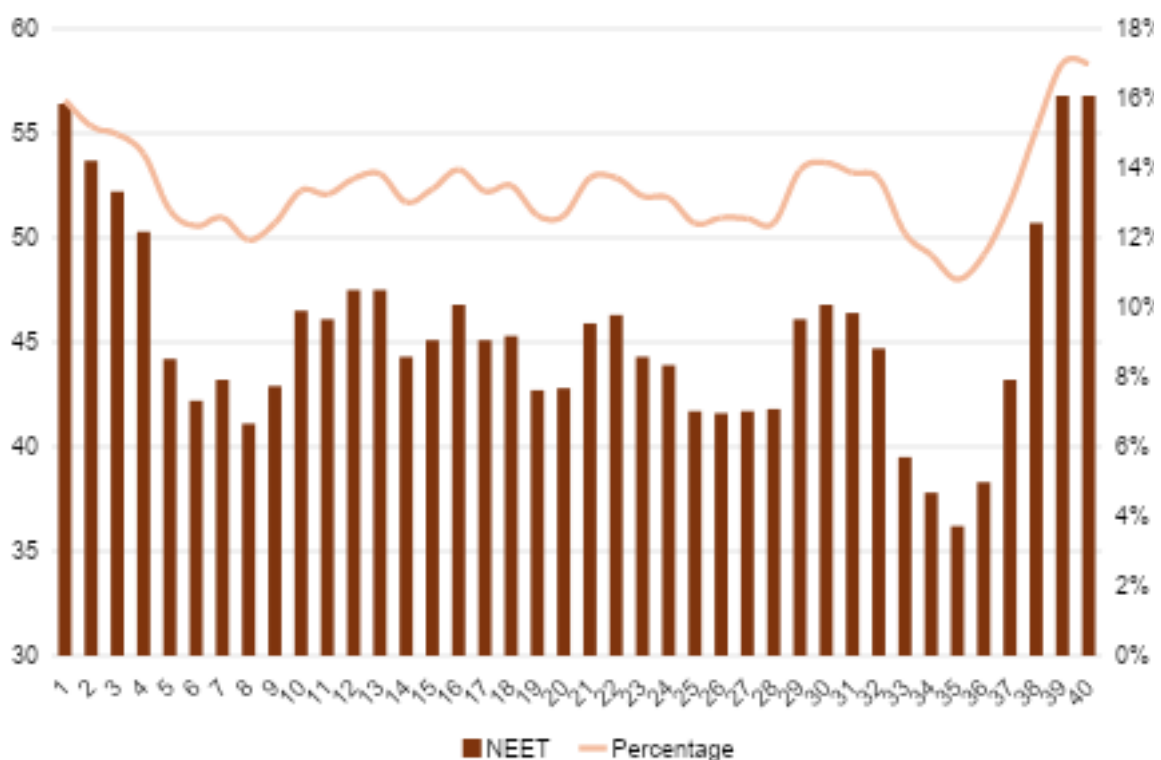
² [The Federation of Master Builders](#)

³ Welsh Government, Assessing workforce requirements for home retrofitting in Wales, <https://www.gov.wales/assessing-workforce-requirements-home-retrofitting-wales>

2. Emerging Trends in Youth Disengagement

The latest government statistics highlight a substantial increase in the proportion of young people in Wales who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the year ending December 2025. In the year ending December 2025, 17.0% of young people aged 16 to 24 were NEET. Following more than a decade of generally improving outcomes, this latest increase marks a notable departure from the previous trajectory. The proportion of young people who were NEET has increased by 4.4 percentage points over the last five years, returning to levels last seen around 2013.⁴ This suggests that the deterioration observed during 2025 is unlikely to represent a short-term fluctuation and instead reflects a reversal of several years of gradual progress.

Chart 1: NEET Trend



The quarterly trend in Chart 1 illustrates rapidly changing conditions over a relatively short period, with the pace of change in 2025 notably significant. The data indicate a sustained deterioration in the proportion of young people classified as NEET, increasing throughout the year before stabilising in the final quarter. This pattern

⁴ To ensure the chart fits on a single page, it presents data from 2016 onwards. Earlier data are available in the Welsh Government publication: <https://www.gov.wales/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-neet-2025.html#203052>.

suggests that fewer young people were engaged in education, employment or training over the period, and the sustained increase across successive rolling annual estimates suggests the deterioration is unlikely to reflect a single isolated event.

The number of young people classified as NEET rose from 38,300 in the year ending December 2024 to 56,800 in the year ending December 2025, marking an increase of 18,500 (48.3%). This significant rise illustrates the scale of the increase in the number of young people outside education, employment or training.

3. Inequalities Across Population Groups

The available data shows persistent inequalities, and the likelihood of being NEET is not evenly distributed across the young population. There are inequalities associated with disability and, to a lesser extent, geography.

Disabled young people are substantially more likely to be classified as NEET than those without a disability, with the disparity becoming even more pronounced among those aged 19 to 24. Young disabled adults (aged 16 to 24) are approximately four times more likely to be NEET than their non-disabled peers (Table 1). This persistent gap suggests that structural barriers continue to affect educational progression, labour market participation and access to appropriate employment opportunities.

Table 1: Three-year rolling average estimates of young people who were NEET by disability status⁵

	2021-2023	2022-2024	2023-2025
16 to 18 years old - disabled	20%	18%	19%
16 to 18 years old - not disabled	6%	5%	6%
19 to 24 years old - disabled	39%	38%	40%
19 to 24 years old - not disabled	9%	8%	9%
16 to 24 years old - disabled	34%	33%	35%
16 to 24 years old - not disabled	8%	7%	8%

The age profile of disability also provides an important insight. The increase in NEET rates between disabled young people aged 16 to 18 and those aged 19 to 24 indicates that inequalities widen after compulsory education. This may reflect challenges associated with transitioning from education into further study, apprenticeships or employment, where support mechanisms often become less comprehensive. The findings, therefore, highlight the importance of sustained

⁵ Columns represent three-year rolling periods ending December 2023, December 2024 and December 2025 (for example, 2021–2023 covers the period from the year ending December 2021 to the year ending December 2023).

support beyond compulsory education rather than interventions focused solely on younger age groups.

Regional variation is comparatively modest but remains evident across Wales. North Wales recorded the highest proportion of young people who were NEET, while South East Wales recorded the lowest. Although the overall differences between regions are relatively small, they demonstrate that youth disengagement is not evenly distributed geographically.

Table 2: Three-year rolling average estimates in percentage of young people who were NEET by region

	2021-2023	2022-2024	2023-2025
North Wales	13.8	14.7	15.1
Mid and South West Wales	14.5	13.5	14.5
South East Wales	12.0	11.2	13.4
Wales	13.1	12.6	14.1

The proportion of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) varied by gender over the period 2021 to 2024. In 2021, the estimated NEET rate was slightly higher among males (16.5%) than females (15.5%). Male NEET rates then declined steadily to 12.4% by 2024, representing a reduction of 4.1 percentage points. In contrast, the female NEET rate fell from 15.5% in 2021 to 11.0% in 2023 before increasing sharply to 15.2% in 2024. As a result, while males had higher NEET rates between 2021 and 2023, the position reversed in 2024, when the estimated proportion of females who were NEET (15.2%) exceeded that of males (12.4%) by 2.8 percentage points.

Table 3: Estimated proportion of young people who were NEET by gender

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Females	15.5	12.2	11	15.2
Males	16.5	15.2	15.1	12.4

4. Wales in Context

The proportion of young people in NEET increased substantially in Wales compared to other regions in the United Kingdom. Wales experienced a sharp rise in the proportion of young people who were NEET during 2025; estimates for England, Scotland and the United Kingdom remained broadly stable over the same period. This suggests that the Welsh increase cannot be explained solely by broader UK labour market conditions.

Table 3: Proportion of 16 to 24-year-olds who were NEET across the UK (%)⁶

	2024	2025
Wales	12%	17%
England	14%	13%
Scotland	14%	12%
Northern Ireland	9%	9%
UK	13%	13%

5. Conclusion

Overall, the evidence suggests that youth disengagement has become more acute in Wales. Following a prolonged period of declining NEET rates, the proportion of young people who were not in education, employment or training increased markedly during the year ending December 2025, reversing several years of progress. The increase is reflected in both the proportion and estimated number of young people affected. The increase is also evident over time and occurs alongside persistent inequalities experienced by disabled young people.

⁶ Note: Figures represent the percentage of 16 to 24-year-olds who were NEET in the years ending December 2024 and December 2025.