MOVEMENT TO WORK

Levelling the playing field

Exploring the potential of generative AI to support NEET young people into work

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Research Partners

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GetMyFirstJob is on a mission to inform people about their options and create effective and efficient routes into training and employment - a mission that started over 10 years ago, inspiring millions of people across the country during this time. Whether you know exactly what career you want to pursue or have no idea where to start, there's advice, guidance, opportunities and information to suit everyone. From apprenticeships to work experience, bootcamps to graduate programmes, they cater to everyone - no matter your starting point.

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The Prince's Trust believes that every young person should have the chance to succeed, no matter what their background or the challenges they are facing. We help those from disadvantaged communities and those facing the greatest adversity by supporting them to build the confidence and skills to live, learn and earn. The courses offered by The Trust help young people aged 11-30 to develop essential life skills, get ready for work and access job opportunities. We support them to find work because having a job or running a business can lead to a more stable, fulfilling life.

www.princes-trust.org.uk

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend a profound thank you to everyone who has participated in our research — in particular, the young people who have taken time to respond to our survey and join our workshops. Your insights have been invaluable.

Foreword

At Movement to Work, we recognise the immense untapped potential of unemployed young people across the UK. We're on a mission to level the playing field by working with businesses to create meaningful employment pathways for NEET young people, empowering them with the opportunities, experiences, and skills to succeed.

Generative AI is everywhere, transforming industries and the future of work. However, young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) are at risk of being left behind. They face challenges in accessing this technology and compared to their peers, are less likely to recognise the importance of digital skills for their future careers. This lack of access and awareness could limit their ability to adapt to the rapidly evolving employment landscape.

Here at Movement to Work, we've been told many times how NEET young people are falling at the first hurdle – application processes and recruitment practises are often very difficult to navigate, especially for those who face multiple barriers to work. On a recent visit to a Youth Hub, we heard how some spend over 35 hours a week completing job applications. At such a young age, it isn't hard to imagine the toll this takes on their mental health and wellbeing.

This stark reality prompted a question within our team: Could generative AI be leveraged to support NEET young people into work?

Despite the rapid advancements in AI, the capability of generative AI to assist NEET young people in their access to employment has remained largely unexplored until now, as has the role of employers in leveraging this technology to level the playing field. I am delighted that our research partners—Oxford Insights, The Prince's Trust, and our sponsors Accenture, Microsoft, and GetMyFirstJob—recognise the urgency and importance of this study.

Our research has not only reaffirmed some of the core challenges NEET young people face in pursuing employment, such as inaccessible recruitment processes and mental health struggles, but it also uncovered significant potential. Generative AI could be a powerful tool for helping NEET young people overcome barriers they have traditionally struggled with.

We know that employers are beginning to consider the impact of generative AI on their workplaces and how it will reshape the skills required for entry-level roles and more. By acting now to equip NEET young people with essential generative AI training and tools, we can empower them to develop the skills needed to navigate and thrive in the job market now and into the future.

This report provides key insights, practical recommendations, and calls to action for employers, policymakers, and NEET young people themselves, underscoring the need to embrace generative AI responsibly to remove barriers to employment. Additionally, it encourages employers to adopt inclusive hiring practices that directly address the structural challenges NEET young people experience in accessing employment, and in doing so, paving the way for a future-proofed workforce.

In response to these findings, Movement to Work is committed to promoting best practice to UK employers and ensuring young people have the best possible chance of forging successful early careers.

Alongside this research, we will launch our Youth Engagement Plan to ensure that NEET young people benefit from these insights and gain access to meaningful employment opportunities. Over the next six months, in collaboration with our partners, we will roll out targeted communication campaigns alongside education and training initiatives aimed at upskilling NEET young people and raising awareness of the possibilities that generative AI offers.

We invite you to join us in this effort to help #YoungPeopleWork

Sareena Bains, CEO, Movement to Work

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Executive summary

Generative AI (gen AI) will change employment, either through making routine tasks much easier to complete or by transforming the nature of work entirely. During this change, we must ensure young people who are currently not in education, employment, or training (NEET) are not left behind.

Young people who are NEET are often stuck in a 'no experience, no job' cycle. Gen AI can help break this cycle by supporting the job application process. Still, only 14% of surveyed NEET young people currently use gen AI to help them complete job applications. At the same time, as employers across sectors start to reflect on how gen AI will change the skills required for entry-level roles, they value candidates that are aware of gen AI and know how to use it.

Why now?

This is an important time to reflect on the role of gen AI for the future of work. Many employers, recruiters, and candidates across sectors are uncertain about how gen AI will change the skills and tasks of entry-level roles in the next 3 to 5 years. This uncertainty presents opportunities for both employers and NEET young people. Employers that intentionally, proactively, and transparently reflect on the responsible use of gen AI now will be able to identify the skills they need for the future, support young people in obtaining them, and build a future-proofed workforce. At the same time, gen AI can help young people facing barriers to work, ensuring that their fresh perspectives play an active role and shape what the future of work will look like.

Young people who are NEET cannot be left behind

As of August 2024, the UK has at least 872,000 young people who are currently NEET[1]. We must ensure they have the skills and support they need to succeed in a job market that will be impacted by gen AI. Compared to their peers, NEET young people are particularly at risk of being left behind because:

- **They face barriers in accessing gen AI:** NEET young people are much less likely to have access to a computer and to think that digital skills are essential for their future career[2].
- **Resources on how to make the most of gen AI rarely directly target them:** despite the overwhelming amount of information on gen AI use, it is hard to find trustworthy content aimed at young people trying to access the job market.
- Until now, there **has been no research focused specifically on the impacts of gen AI on NEET young people.**

[1] Based on the Office for National Statistics' estimate, covering NEET young people aged 16-24. For more details, see https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/august2024

[2] Nominet Social Impact, 'Digital Youth Index Report', 2023, https://digitalyouthindex.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Digital-Youth-Index-2023-report.pdf

The research

This research focuses on young people (16 to 30 years old) who are NEET and looking for entry-level roles and how gen AI might impact them.

We collected the opinions of NEET young people, employers, and recruiters through in-person workshops across the UK, interviews, and an online survey.

We sought to understand:

1. **The 'as is' picture:** which challenges NEET young people face when accessing the job market, their thoughts on and uses of gen AI, and how gen AI is affecting hiring processes.

2. **How to level the playing field:** how gen AI can help NEET young people in the application process, the skills employers are looking for in the future of work, and how employers can improve their hiring practices to support NEET young people.

Key insights

- **Most young people who are NEET are aware of gen AI, but approximately half have never used it.** While 85.5% of respondents know what gen AI is, only 48.6% have knowingly used it, and even fewer use it on a regular basis.
- **Gen AI can alleviate some of the barriers that NEET young people face when looking for entry level jobs.** In every regional in-person workshop, young people emphasised that complex and long job applications were demotivating and exhausting. Gen AI can streamline the process by helping them write and edit applications, identify transferable skills, prepare for interviews, and clarify language.
- **Most young people who are NEET do not use gen AI to support the completion of applications, possibly because they fear they might be penalised for it.** Only 14.5% of survey participants have used gen AI to help complete a job application and 48.6% felt that using it in the application process would make employers less likely to hire them.
- **Employers across sectors are open to candidates using gen AI responsibly in the application process and see its use as an indicator of employable skills.** Many view it as a sign of resourcefulness, innovative thinking, and curiosity.
- **Employers are starting to think about gen AI skills for their workplaces.** Most are beginning to discuss how gen AI will change skill requirements for entry-level roles in 3 to 5 years. In particular, those in the recruiting and knowledge sectors expect gen AI to change entry-level jobs.

Key recommendations

- Employers should **be clear about when applicants can or cannot use gen AI**.
- Employers can use gen AI to improve the hiring process, **using gen AI to provide personalised feedback** to young people more efficiently - *see our employers' guide*.
- Employers should ensure that their hiring process **supports NEET young people**, providing feedback and minimising requirements - *see our employers' guide*.
- Employers should **identify the key gen AI skills they will need in the future and support access to learning pathways and resources** that will benefit NEET young people.
- Young people who are NEET can build their awareness and confidence with gen AI to bring new perspectives to employers. **Movement to Work will support with access to free training and trustworthy educational resources on gen AI**.
- Policymakers and the education system need to develop **a comprehensive approach to gen AI** to help young people responsibly use it in their careers.

What now?

We are at an inflection point regarding how organisations position themselves with respect to gen AI. Employers' decisions will impact NEET young people and their ability to access the job market, whether through the application process or the skills they require.

This research aims to begin a discussion on how organisations can level the playing field for NEET young people struggling to enter the job market, especially as gen AI shapes it more and more. Employers, recruiters, and young people need to collectively shape a future of work that is inclusive, fair, and responsible.

Introduction

Between June and August 2024, Movement to Work and Oxford Insights conducted research into the impact of generative AI (gen AI) on young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) seeking entry-level jobs.

The research has been conducted in partnership with The Prince's Trust and sponsored by Accenture, Microsoft, and GetMyFirstJob.

As the use of gen AI in the general population increases[3], we need to ensure that NEET young people have the tools, support, and skills to play an active role in the future of work.

This research is the first of its kind. While the body of evidence on the impacts of gen AI on young people has slowly increased, there is no research specifically targeting young (16-30) NEET people. We aim to understand:

- **The 'as is' picture:** how young people who are NEET currently access the job market, their challenges and uses of gen AI, and what hiring processes look like.
- **How to level the playing field:** how gen AI can help NEET young people in the application process, the skills employers are looking for in the future of work, and how employers can support NEET young people.

To do so, we conducted 3 main research activities:

1. A **survey** for young people who are currently NEET on their experience in the job application process, and their use of and attitudes towards gen AI. We received 173 valid survey responses.
2. Six **in-person workshops with NEET young people**, delivered in Youth Hubs across the UK[4]. In these workshops, we gathered in-depth, qualitative evidence about the challenges that participants face when applying for jobs, alongside their use of and interest in gen AI. In total, 37 young people attended the workshops.
3. **Interviews with employers and recruiters** to understand their hiring processes, approach to candidates using gen AI, and the skills that they are looking for in the future of work. We interviewed 8 employers and 2 recruiting agencies. Our sample covered large employers across a range of sectors: retail, hospitality, banking, manufacturing, technology, consulting, and construction.

Below, we provide a breakdown of the demographics of survey respondents and workshop participants. For the full methodology, please see page **41**.

[3] Cristina Criddle and Delphine Strauss, 'Jobhunters flood recruiters with AI-generated CVs', Financial Times, August 13, 2024 https://www.ft.com/content/30a032dd-bdaa-4aee-bc51-754867abbde0

[4] Youth Hubs are an external provider site where DWP work coaches are co located. Youth Hubs share spaces with partners including colleges, charities, training providers and local councils, allowing young people to access a range of services in one location (see p.12).

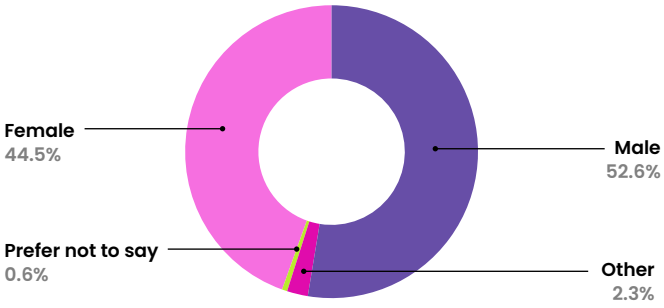
Survey respondents

We received 173 valid responses to our survey.

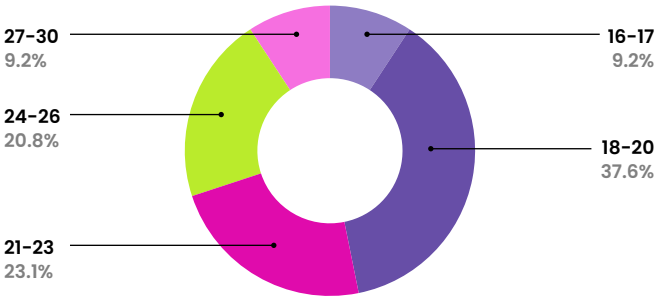
The survey included screening questions to ensure we only received responses from people aged 16 to 30 who were living in the UK and not in education, employment, or training at the time of the survey. The Annex contains the full list of survey questions.

Selected demographics of the sample are reported below:

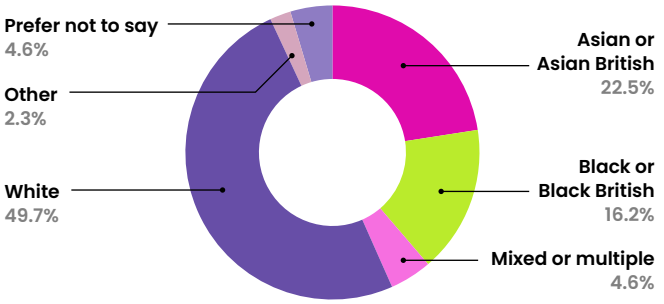
Gender of survey respondents



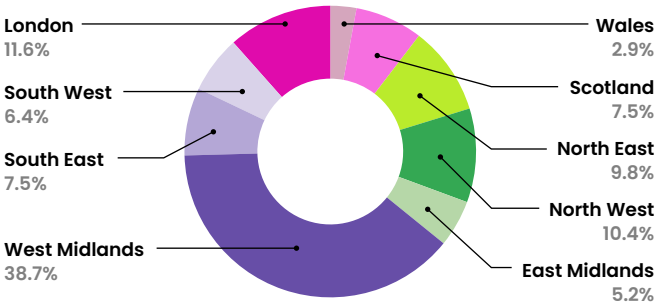
Age of survey respondents



Ethnic group of survey respondents



Location of survey respondents



A note on location: The West Midlands region is significantly overrepresented in our sample. Several factors may have contributed to this regional bias.

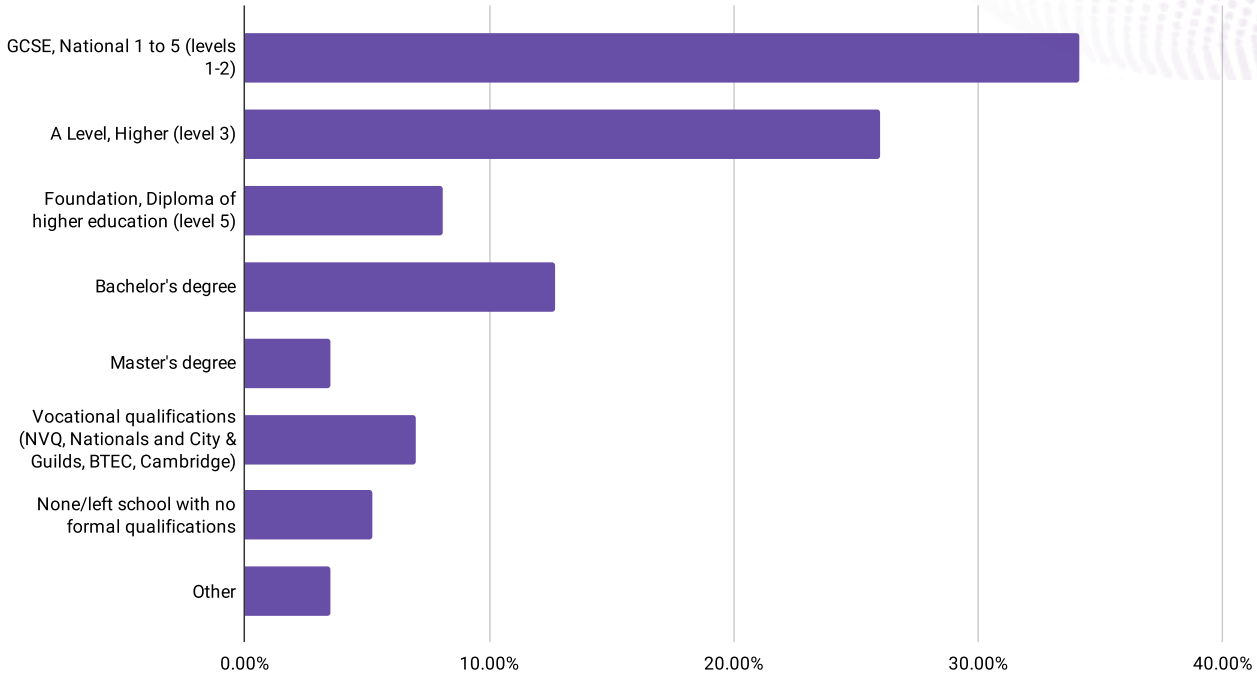
First, the survey was shared with the support of the Department for Work and Pensions, GetMyFirstJob, and Movement to Work's partners to ensure higher take up rates. These organisations shared the survey with their audiences via email, social media, advertisements on their websites, and printed QR codes for young people to see in person in some cases. Oxford Insights also shared the survey on its social media. It is possible that these partners have a particularly strong presence in the West Midlands, potentially amplifying the survey's reach in this region.

At the same time, NEET young people in the West Midlands might have higher digital literacy levels or better access to online resources on average, facilitating their participation in the online survey.

Last, the West Midlands may have a higher proportion of young people who are NEET compared to other regions, leading to more responses from this area.

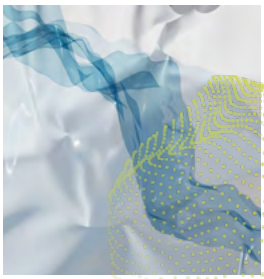
We acknowledge this regional bias. Considering the relatively small sample size of the survey, we recognise the limitations in generalising results for the national population. However, this is one of the first pieces of generative AI research that focuses specifically on NEET young people between 16 and 30 years old, and we envisage that further research will follow, building on the findings of this initial study.

What is the highest level of eduation you have completed?

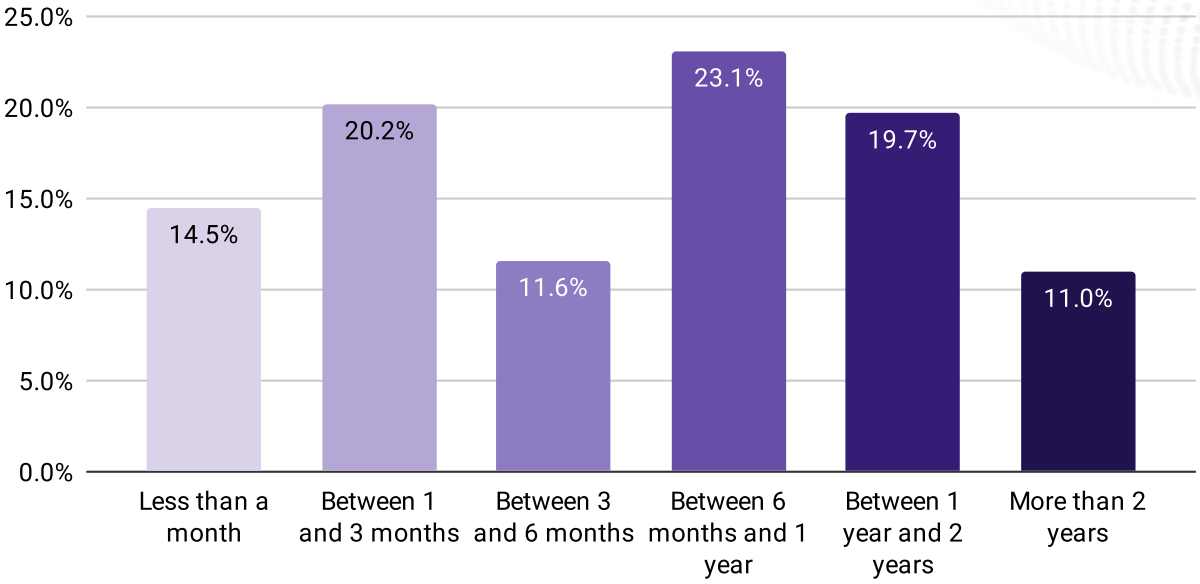


Other demographics:

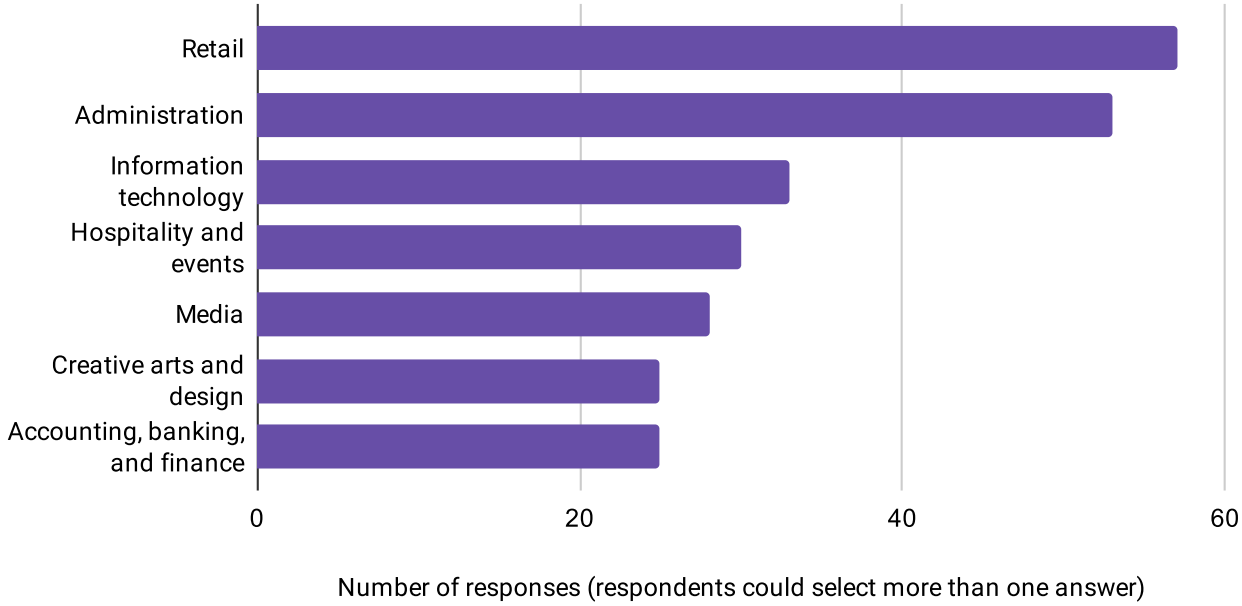
- **Language:** 9.8% of respondents reported that English is not their main language.
- **Disability:** 24.9% reported having a physical or mental condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more. 17.9% reported having a condition that slightly reduces their ability to carry out daily activities, and 9.8% reported having a condition that significantly reduces their ability to carry out daily activities.
- **Care experience:** 4% of respondents reported being care leavers, and 1.7% are currently in care.
- **Caring responsibilities:** 8.7% reported having caring responsibilities for children or adults.
- **Parents:** 8.1% of respondents reported being parents.
- **Free school meals:** 42.2% of respondents reported receiving free school meals at some point during their school years.



How long has it been since you were last in education, employment, or training?



What types of work are you currently applying for or planning to apply for?



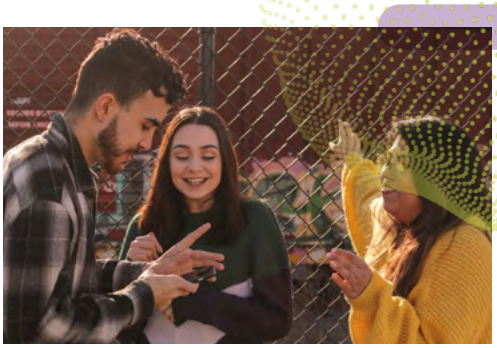
Digital access:

- Approximately half of respondents who are currently applying for jobs usually use a laptop or desktop computer to apply for jobs online (49.7%), and approximately half usually use a mobile phone (48.5%). The remaining 1.8% usually use a tablet.
- The majority of respondents currently applying for jobs (89.6%) own the device they usually use to apply for jobs. 8.6% use a device borrowed from or shared with a friend or family member, and only 1.8% use a public device.
- The vast majority of respondents (95.8%) met the Foundation Level of Essential Digital Skills as measured by the Department for Education.[5] This means they are able to independently complete 8 digital tasks that are considered essential for success online.
- 8.1% of respondents said they lack access to WiFi/internet at home, in line with other research on NEET young people.[6] All of these respondents reported that they have access to the internet using mobile data or public internet in public spaces, such as libraries or cafes.

Comparing survey results across demographic groups

We analysed survey data across gender, ethnic group, and eligibility for free school meals to identify any differences in responses by group. While we would have liked to analyse across other groups, such as location, the relatively small total sample size made this difficult.

For the most part, we found that survey results were consistent even across gender, ethnic group, and eligibility for free school meals. In the few instances where results differed significantly across groups, we note this in the report.



[5] For more details, see the redesigned Essential Digital Skills framework in the UK Consumer Digital Index 2022, p. 35 https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/banking_with_us/whats-happening/221103-lloyds-consumer-digital-index-2022-report.pdf
[6] Nominet, '2023 Digital Youth Index', 2023, p. 12, https://digitalyouthindex.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Digital-Youth-Index-2023-report.pdf

Workshop participants

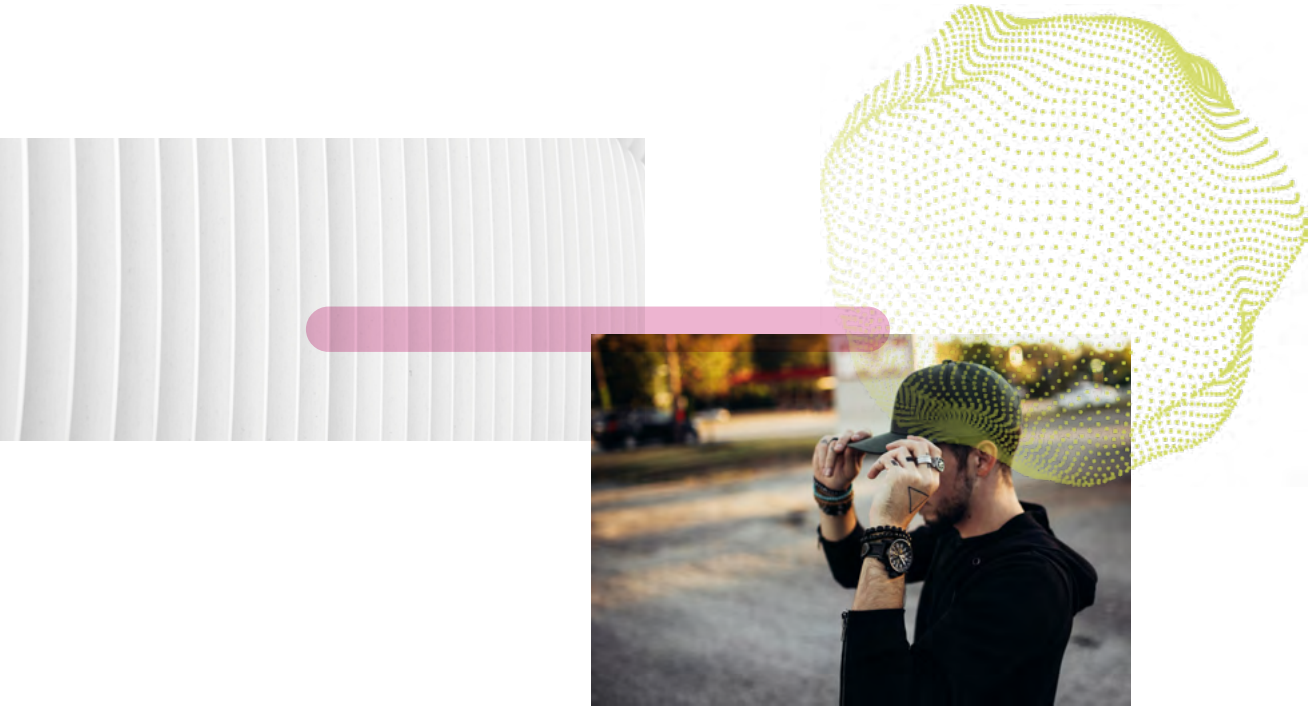
We engaged with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to identify participants for our workshops in Youth Hubs across the UK. Youth Hubs are an agreed external provider site where DWP work coaches are co-located[7] and share spaces with partners including colleges, charities, training providers and local councils[8].

We relied on the support of Youth Hubs to invite the participants.

Participants had the following characteristics:

- between 16-30 years old[9];
- had not been in education, employment, or training for at least 6 months;
- had been looking for opportunities for education, training, or employment and were able to talk about the challenges they had encountered; and,
- constituted a diverse mix in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and background.

During the workshops, we did not ask for or record participants' demographic data.



[7] Department for Work and Pension, Jobcentre plus, 'Jobcentre Plus Youth Hubs', https://www.yhphnetwork.co.uk/media/114112/session-1a-jobcentre-plus-youth-hubs.pdf
[8] Department for Work and Pensions, Mims Davies MP, 'Over 110 new Youth Hubs offer job help'. 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-110-new-youth-hubs-offer-job-help
[9] DWP customers in the Youth Hubs are aged 16 to 24 years old. However, because Movement to Work's target audience is 16 to 30-year-olds, Youth Hubs also invited participants from the 25 to 30 age group.

Background: Generative AI in the hiring process

Generative AI (gen AI) is a rapidly-growing field of artificial intelligence that enables machines to generate new content such as videos, text, images, audio and code. It uses algorithms to identify patterns in data and create new outputs that are similar to those produced by humans.

While the impacts of gen AI on employment are still unclear, gen AI will likely shape the future of work, particularly impacting entry-level and office roles.[10] Gen AI also has the potential to support inexperienced or less skilled workers the most, potentially supporting NEET young people in accessing employment for the first time.[11]

Gen AI can also be used to support the application process. Candidates can use gen AI tools at almost every stage of the job search and application process, for instance, suggesting roles that might be a good fit for their skills, researching a company, helping to draft and tailor cover letters and CVs, or refining interview answers and holding mock interviews. Evidence indicates that an increasing number of candidates are using gen AI across the application process. While estimates vary, different studies indicate an upward trend, especially for office workers and students or recent graduates. In a 2023 survey of UK office workers,[12] 46% of respondents said they were using AI to search and apply for jobs. A recent study on UK students and graduates found that 17% were using ChatGPT to apply for jobs and 70% would consider doing so in the future.[13]

What employers think of this is an open question, especially considering that candidates might be increasingly expected to use gen AI in their career. There is evidence that at least some employers are looking for candidates who can use artificial intelligence: in a survey of knowledge workers, 57% of UK business leaders said they would not hire someone without AI skills, and 64% would rather hire a less experienced candidate with AI skills than a more experienced one without them.[14]

While the evidence on gen AI is growing, there is a clear gap regarding NEET young people, their views on and uses of gen AI, and how gen AI might support them in the job search. This research aims to begin to fill this gap.

[10] Carsten Jung and Bhargav Srinivasa Desikan, 'Transformed by AI: How generative artificial intelligence could affect work in the UK – and how to manage it', Institute for Public Policy Research, 2024, https://www.ippr.org/articles/transformed-by-ai
[11] Capraro et al, 'The impact of generative artificial intelligence on socioeconomic inequalities and policy making,' PNAS Nexus, 2024, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11165650/
[12] Beamery, 'Beamery Talent Index', 2023, https://beamery.com/resources/news/the-ai-employment-revolution-over-half-of-job-seekers-in-uk-have-noticed-ai-used-during-recruitment-process
[13] Arctic Shores, 'How students' use of Generative AI will make traditional selection processes redundant', 2023, https://landing.arcticshores.com/en-gb/how-students-use-of-generative-ai-will-make-traditional-selection-processes-redundant
[14] Microsoft and LinkedIn, '2024 Work Trend Index Annual Report', 8 May 2024, https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/ai-at-work-is-here-now-comes-the-hard-part

Findings

Gen AI can alleviate some of the barriers that NEET young people face when looking for entry level jobs. Gen AI can support NEET young people across the application process, from identifying and researching roles that align with their skills, to helping to write and edit applications, to practising interview questions (**p.34**). While many challenges require broader improvements to the hiring processes (**p.37**), gen AI can support young people to navigate the length and complexity of the job application process, reducing the mental toll of the job search.

Gen AI can support NEET young people across the application process

While **85.5%** of respondents know what gen AI is, only **48.6%** have knowingly used it

Most young people who are NEET are aware of gen AI, but approximately half have never used it. While 85.5% of respondents know what gen AI is, only 48.6% have knowingly used it, and even fewer use it on a regular basis (**pp.23-27**). Most NEET young people reported not using gen AI because they did not think it would be useful to them, because they have concerns around its responsible use, or because they do not have access to it or do not know how to use it.

Most young people who are NEET do not use gen AI to support the completion of applications, possibly because they fear they might be penalised for it. 26.6% of all respondents used gen AI in some steps of the application process. While 12.1% only used gen AI for 'indirect' tasks like researching roles or practising interviews, only 14.5% of survey participants have used gen AI to help complete a job application. Meanwhile, 48.6% felt that using gen AI in the application process would make the employer less likely to hire them (**p. 26**).

14.5% of survey participants have used gen AI to help complete a job application

Findings

Employers across sectors are open to candidates using gen AI responsibly[15] in the application process and see it as an indicator of employable skills. While young people are concerned about employers penalising them for using gen AI skills, employers and recruiters are generally very positive about applicants using gen AI (**pp. 33-34**). Many employers view the responsible use of gen AI as a sign of skills they are looking for, such as resourcefulness, innovative thinking, curiosity, and creativity. Employers appreciate candidates who bring an awareness of gen AI and help them use it in their business (**p.35**).

Employers and recruiters are **generally very positive** about applicants using gen AI

Most are beginning to discuss **how gen AI will change skill requirements** for entry-level roles

Employers are starting to think about gen AI skills for their workplaces. Most are beginning to discuss how gen AI will change skill requirements for entry-level roles in the near future. While gen AI skills have not made their way to job descriptions for entry-level roles yet, this is likely to change in the next 3-5 years. Recruiters and knowledge workers expect an increase in skills that best complement the use of gen AI such as digital skills, adaptability, and strategic thinking (**p.35**).

[15] Being able to responsibly use gen AI includes being aware of considerations on ethics, data integrity and confidentiality, intellectual property and copyright, and accuracy and reliability (for reference, see University of Canterbury, 'Responsible use of Gen-AI tools', last accessed in August 2024 https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/study-support-info/gen-ai-at-uc/responsible-use-gen-ai-tools). In practice, the responsible use of gen AI for NEET young people can include cross-referencing with reliable sources; editing and tailoring content and avoiding a blind 'copy-paste'; and being transparent about the use of gen AI tools.

The ‘as is’: what is it like for NEET young people to access the job market?

What challenges do NEET young people face?

To understand how gen AI can support them, we asked young people who are NEET to share the challenges that they currently face when trying to access entry-level roles.

We identified 3 core challenges that NEET young people face across the whole application process, regardless of location, age, gender, level of education, and sectors they are applying to. These are, in order of prevalence:

1. Lack of responses or feedback from employers

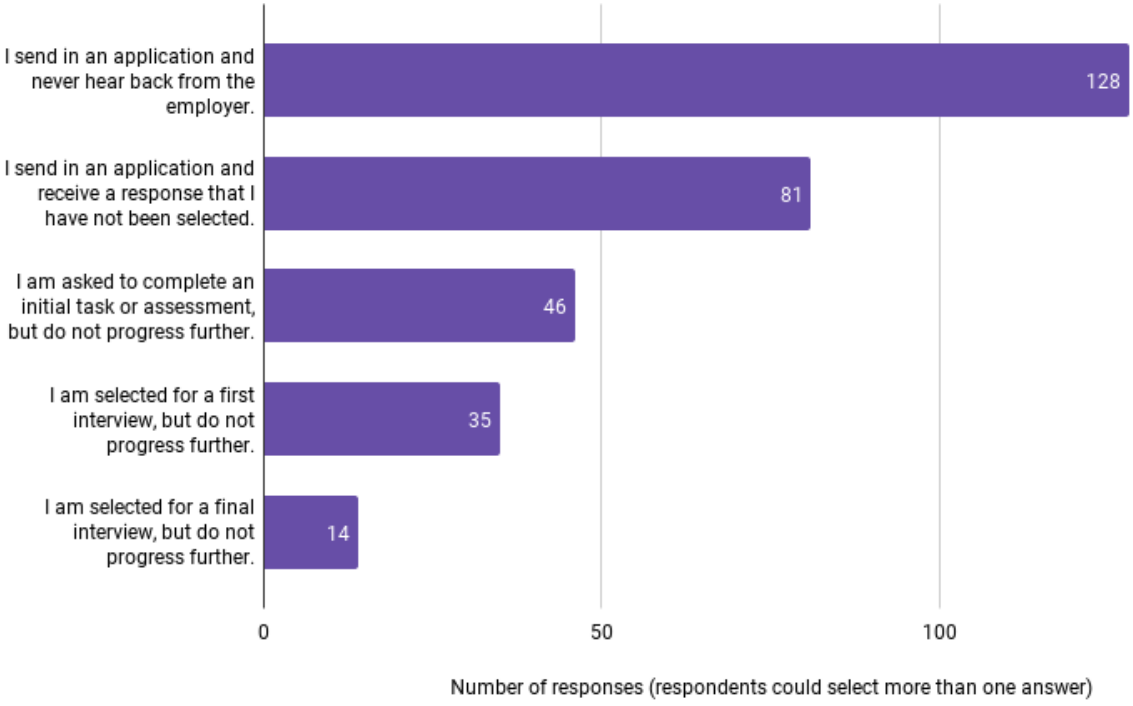
2. Job requirements that are unrealistic for entry level roles

3. The length and complexity of the application process, and the negative impact this has on young people’s mental health

1. Young people rarely receive responses or feedback from prospective employers.

This is the single challenge young people highlighted the most: 78.5% of respondents said that the most common outcome of an application was never hearing back.

When you apply for jobs, what is the most common outcome?



Each respondent could select more than one answer. This question was only asked of respondents who said they had searched for or applied to jobs in the past year. 163 respondents answered this question.

This was supported by qualitative insights from the workshop and survey. Participants said they rarely receive feedback on their application, even after interviews, and this hinders their ability to improve the quality of their applications. This is '**demotivating**' and '**draining**,' and makes them '**feel exhausted**' and '**hopeless**'[16].

> "It's a very **dehumanising** process as a whole."
>
> **Survey respondent**

> "Send response emails even if it's a no."
>
> **Survey respondent**

[16] Direct quotes from workshop participants

2. Young people who are NEET feel that many jobs list requirements that are not suitable for entry-level jobs, either in terms of work experience or qualifications.

63.1% of survey respondents cited lack of experience as a top factor making it more difficult for them to get a job. In the workshops, participants highlighted how jobs that are advertised as entry-level often require previous work experience or strict requirements in terms of qualifications that require time and financial investment.

"I can't apply for work without experience, but the only experience you can get is volunteering. I can't afford to work for free."

Workshop participant

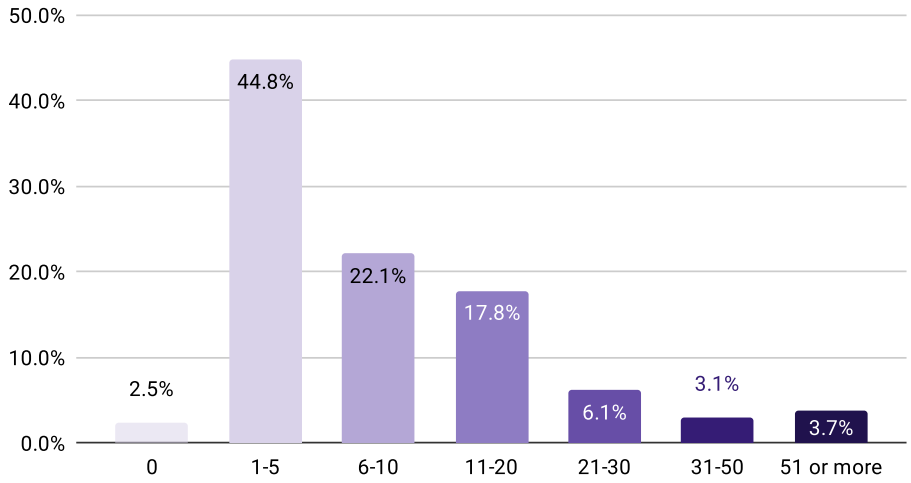
"Jobs ask for experience that I can't get unless they hire me inexperienced."

Workshop participant

3. NEET young people struggle with the length and complexity of the application process, and it is impacting their mental health.

The large majority of survey respondents **create between 1 and 10 job applications per week.** In every regional workshop, participants linked the complexity and length of the job application process to negative impacts on their mental health. Almost every single participant shared **feelings of anxiety** related to a prolonged, unsuccessful job search, especially combined with the lack of feedback and response from employers.

On average, how many jobs do you apply for per week?



This question was only asked of respondents who said they had searched for or applied to jobs in the past year. 163 respondents answered this question.

25% of survey respondents identified mental health challenges as a top factor making it more difficult for them to find employment. Long, complex, and disheartening application processes risk worsening young people's mental health and can lead young people who are NEET to drop out of the job market, limiting their prospects and their contribution to the workforce. This does not only affect young people: as NEET young people become economically inactive, employers miss out on potentially valuable and resourceful candidates.

"**Is it worth doing** all this work if I don't get to work?"

Workshop participant

"[I used to feel] **very anxious**, but now the majority of time [I feel] false hope"

Workshop participant

Application step-specific challenges

In addition to the **3 core challenges** mentioned above, NEET young people also mentioned **specific challenges** that refer to particular steps of the application process. These have been informed by qualitative findings in the survey and workshop. We report them in the table below.

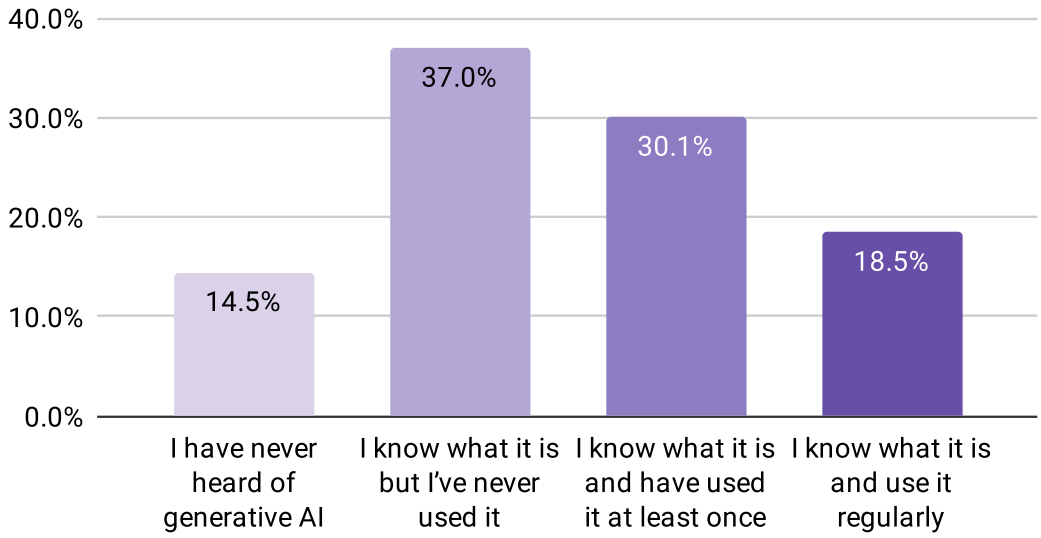
Step in the application process	Challenge
Searching for and finding jobs to apply to	**Distance from the job site and available travel links**, including employers requiring a driving licence.
	Finding the right jobs that match the candidate's skillset.
	Finding up-to-date jobs. Many young people reported applying for advertised positions that have already been filled, or jobs that are repeatedly advertised but do not reply to candidates.
	Volunteer positions are advertised more frequently than paid ones, but many NEET young people cannot afford to gain experience for free.
	Unclear and confusing language in job specifications and requirements makes it hard for young people to understand the day-to-day tasks included in the work and whether it might be a good fit for them, particularly for people with learning disabilities who might struggle with highly abstract information.
	Unclear language on how candidates can access support. Some participants highlighted how the unclear meaning of '**reasonable adjustments**' stopped them from requesting adjustments or applying to the job, as they struggled to understand whether these would apply to them and the type of support available.
Writing applications	Understanding **what to include in a CV/cover letter**, specifically when they have **no work experience**. NEET young people have expressed uncertainty on whether and how to include other experience and skills, for instance from volunteering, education, or personal experience.
	Long written applications, particularly disadvantaging young people with learning disabilities. Most young people we spoke to were submitting CVs and cover letters that were tailored or rewritten for each role. Workshop participants with learning disabilities reported feeling 'disadvantaged' by this even when applying for jobs that they felt they were otherwise well suited for.
	Providing **references** when the candidate has no previous work experience.
Interviewing	Managing **stress, anxiety, and nerves** becomes particularly important when attending interviews for the first time. Participants reported struggling to know and remember what to say due to nerves.
	Answering **interview questions that refer specifically to previous work experience**. In some cases, participants have encountered standardised interview questions that have not been adapted to entry level roles and refer directly to previous work experience.
	Taking **pre-recorded video interviews**. The lack of visual feedback, human interaction, and clarification questions affects young people's performance, who reported feeling more self conscious and intimidated. **'A human would understand you better: they know what you mean to say'** - workshop participant
	Some participants reported **not being paid for trial shifts** for periods as long as months.

What do NEET young people think about gen AI?

Most young people who are NEET are aware of gen AI, but approximately half have never used it.

The large majority of respondents (85.5%) reported knowing what gen AI is, with only 14.5% having never heard of it. While many young people are aware of gen AI, the sample of respondents regularly using the technology is considerably smaller.

How familiar are you with generative AI?



Survey respondents' familiarity with gen AI after being given a brief definition with examples. 173 respondents answered this question.

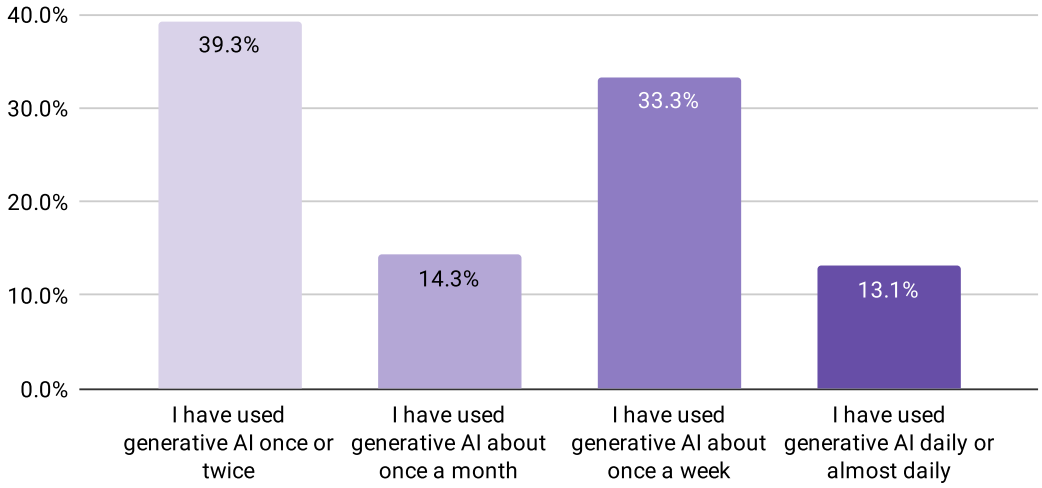
This was one of the few survey questions where there was variation across demographic groups. Female respondents were more likely to say they had never heard of gen AI, with 19.5% of women giving this response compared to 11% of men.

And respondents who were not eligible for free school meals were almost 3 times more likely than those who were eligible for free school meals to say that they use gen AI regularly (25.8% compared to 9.6%).

Only **48.6% of the respondents have actually used gen AI**. Of these, 39.3% have only used it once or twice in the past three months.

The 'as is': what is it like for NEET young people to access the job market?

How frequently have you used generative AI over the past 3 months?

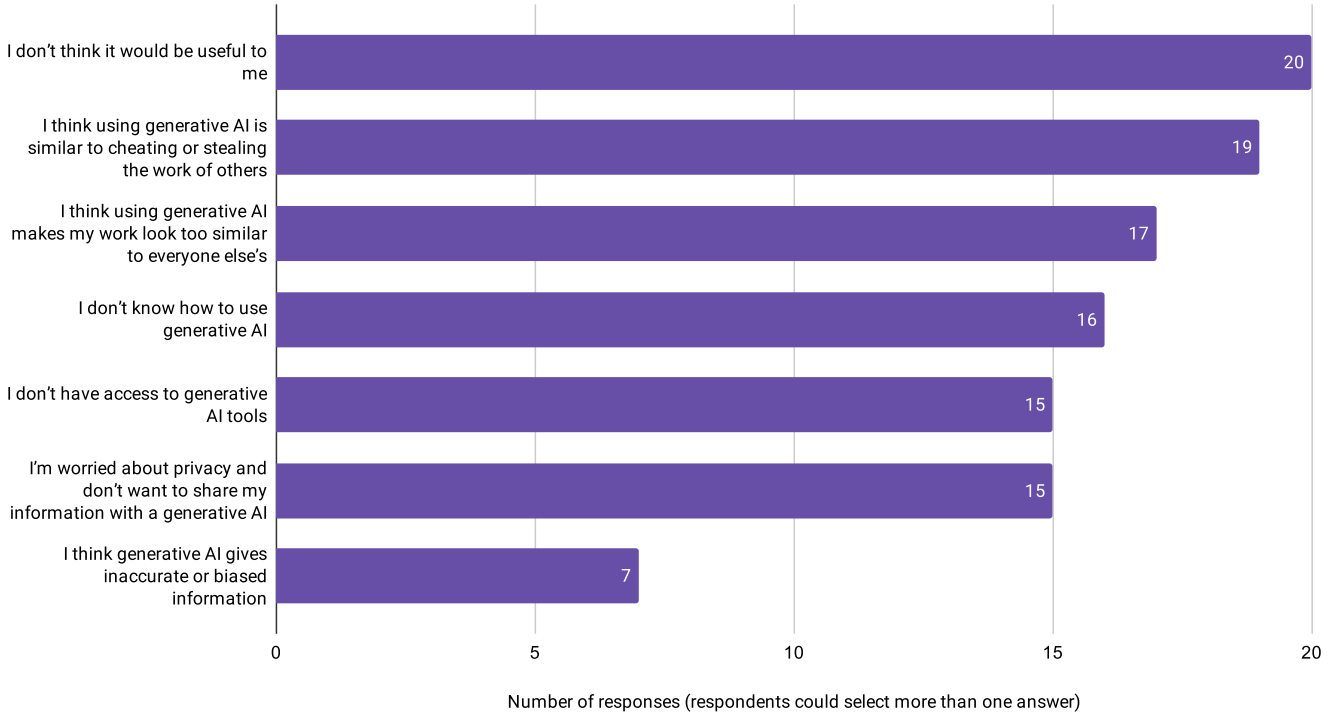


Frequency of use of gen AI in the past three months among survey respondents who reported having used gen AI tools before. 84 respondents answered this question.

The other half of survey respondents (51.5%) said they had never used gen AI. When asked to list the reasons for this, the most common response was 'I don't think it would be useful to me.' Multiple respondents also submitted free text responses stating they had 'never felt the need to use it.'

51.5% said they had never used gen AI

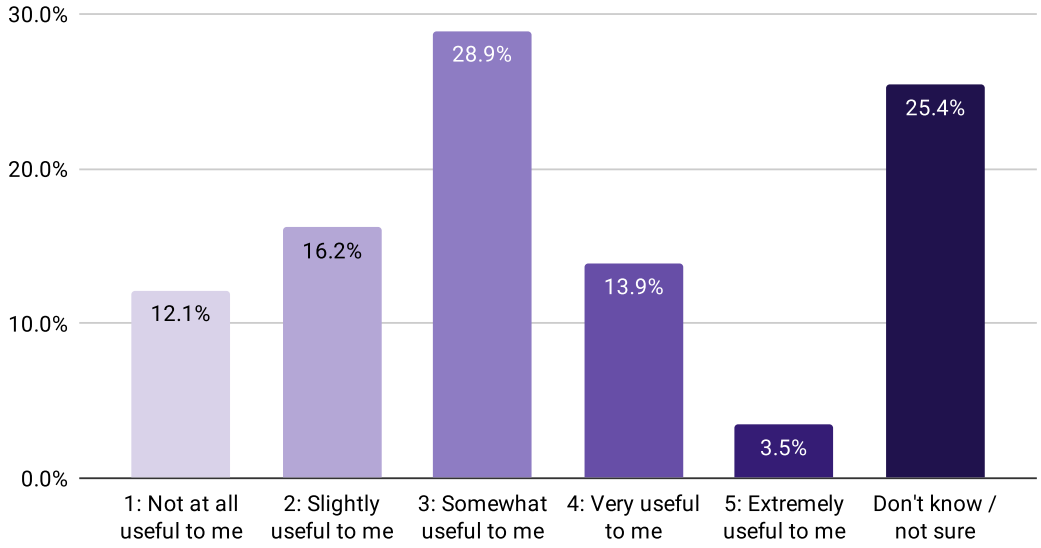
Why have you never used generative AI?



Top reasons for not having used gen AI among survey respondents who reported knowing what gen AI is but never having used it. Each respondent could select more than one answer to this question. 64 respondents answered this question.

This perception is mirrored in the total sample. While the majority of NEET young people feel that gen AI is at least somewhat useful to them, a quarter of respondents are unsure, and 28.3% of respondents felt that gen AI was not at all or only slightly useful to them.

I think generative AI is:



Survey respondents' opinions of how useful gen AI is to them. 173 respondents answered this question.

Many NEET young people feel uncertain about how gen AI can be useful to them. This might be because they are not aware of gen AI use cases that can have a practical effect in their daily lives, such as supporting them in the job application process. As the uptake of gen AI increases, it might be that NEET young people are less aware of valuable practical use cases, and risk missing out on opportunities to use gen AI to improve their daily lives.

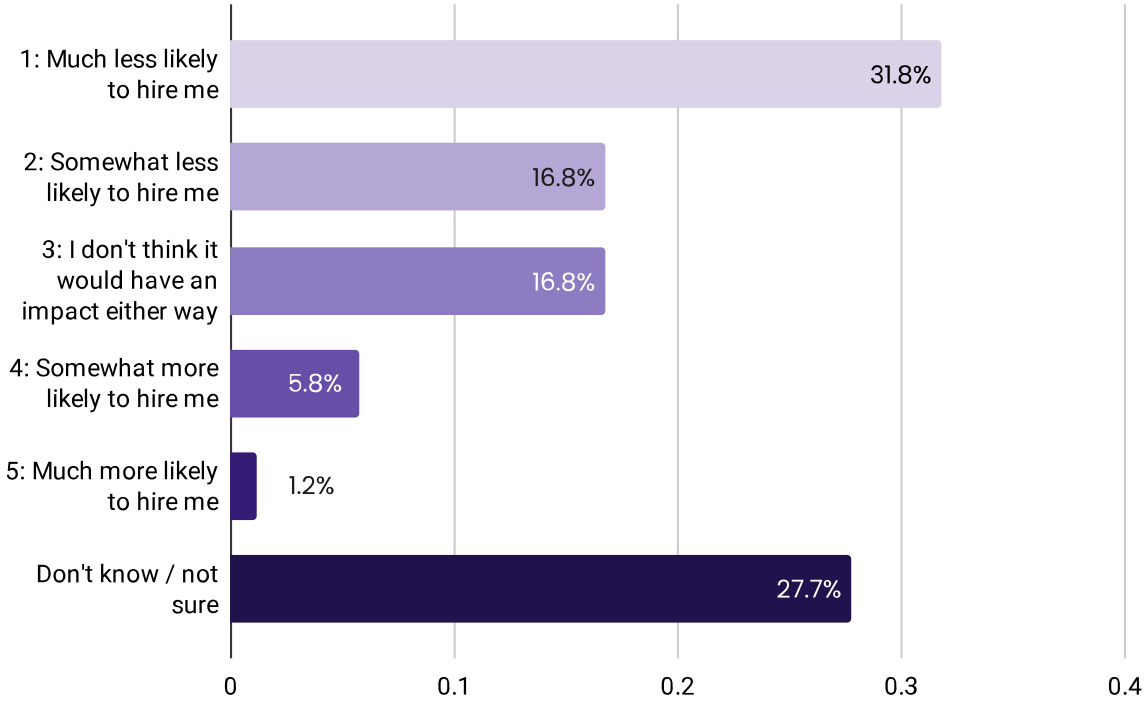
Indeed, most NEET young people do not use gen AI to help them apply for jobs — possibly because most think it would make employers less likely to hire them.

26.6% of all respondents used gen AI in some steps of the application process. Approximately half of these (12.1%) only used gen AI for 'indirect' tasks, such as searching for a role, researching it, or practising interviews. Only 14.4% of all respondents have used gen AI to support the completion of a job application, such as helping to write a CV or cover letter.

Some of the hesitancy to use gen AI to support the completion of applications seems to be from a fear of being penalised by employers. When asked how they thought an employer would respond if they knew a candidate had used gen AI to complete a job application, **48.6% of young people said they thought it would make the employer less likely to hire them**, and only 7% thought it would improve their chances of being hired. When asked what potential employers could do to support young people's use of gen AI, the most common response, selected by 59.5% of respondents, was 'Make it clear whether I am allowed to use gen AI to help me apply for jobs'.

48.6% of young people think using gen AI would make the employer less likely to hire them

I think an employer who knew I used generative AI to complete a job application (for example, using ChatGPT to help me write a cover letter) would be:



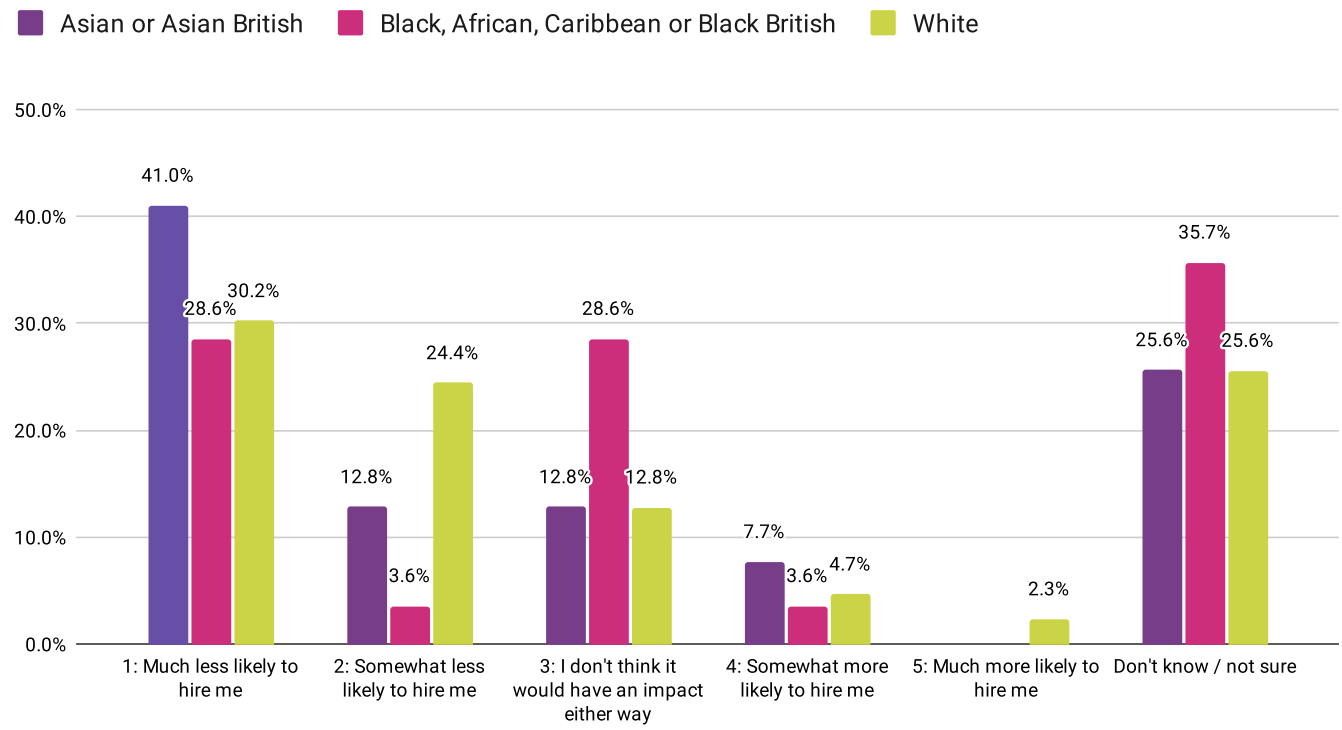
Survey respondents' perceptions of how employers would react to the use of gen AI in a job application. 173 respondents answered this question.

The question of how employers would react to the use of gen AI was one of very few that elicited varying responses across ethnic groups. Asian or Asian British respondents were more likely than those of other ethnic groups to say they thought using gen AI would make an employer much less likely to hire them, with 41% of Asian or Asian British respondents giving this answer compared to 28.6% of Black, African, Caribbean or Black British respondents and 30.2% of white respondents.

Meanwhile, Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British respondents were more than twice as likely as other respondents to say they did not think it would have an impact either way (28.6% compared to 12.8% of Asian or Asian British respondents and 12.8% of white respondents). These differing perceptions highlight the lack of clarity among NEET young people about whether using gen AI in the job application process is allowed.

Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British respondents were more than twice as likely as other respondents to say they did not think it would have an impact either way.

I think an employer who knew I used generative AI to complete a job application (for example, using ChatGPT to help me write a cover letter) would be:



Survey respondents’ perceptions of how employers would react to the use of gen AI in a job application, split by ethnic group. 173 respondents answered this question. Respondents who reported their ethnic group as ‘mixed or multiple ethnic groups’, ‘other,’ or ‘prefer not to say’ were excluded from this analysis due to very small sample sizes.

The fear that using gen AI would be negatively connotated, or considered ‘wrong’, has emerged in other parts of the survey. The concerns of participants are mainly tied to the responsible use of gen AI.

Most of the reasons respondents gave for not using gen AI relate to **concerns around being able to use it responsibly** or in a way that does not take away their personality, affect the quality of their work, or hinder their privacy. Indeed, many young people reported not using gen AI because they found it similar to cheating or stealing the work of others.

Participants care about the responsible use of gen AI, both by them and in society

Similar sentiments came up several times in our workshops, with a few participants having direct experience of AI-generated content being considered plagiarism in academic settings. In the absence of any other narrative, it is possible that the strong negative view of gen AI being conveyed from the education system could at least partly explain some of the respondents' negative views or lack of engagement with this technology, even outside of academia.

In the workshops and qualitative sections of the survey, participants also raised similar concerns:

1. Participants worry about AI-generated content being **inaccurate, biased, or of a lower quality** than what a human would create. Several survey respondents seemed to dislike gen AI due to a perceived lack of human creativity or individuality.

2. Participants expressed concerns over gen AI's **potential negative societal impacts**. In workshops and open text sections of the survey, participants expressed concerns that gen AI could be used to replace human jobs, particularly in creative industries.

3. Some participants were also concerned about the potential for gen AI tools to be **used by malevolent actors to cause severe harm**. In the survey, respondents gave examples ranging from fraud to deepfakes.

These concerns indicate that NEET young people care about the responsible use of gen AI, and want to use a tool that complements rather than suppresses their personality. Considering that the Joint Council for Qualifications[17] and many UK universities[18] ban the unacknowledged use of gen AI tools on assessments, it is possible that NEET young people have not had the opportunity to learn about how to use gen AI in such a way.

[17] Joint Council for Qualifications, 'AI Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications', 2 February 2024, https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/AI-Use-in-Assessments_Feb24_v6.pdf

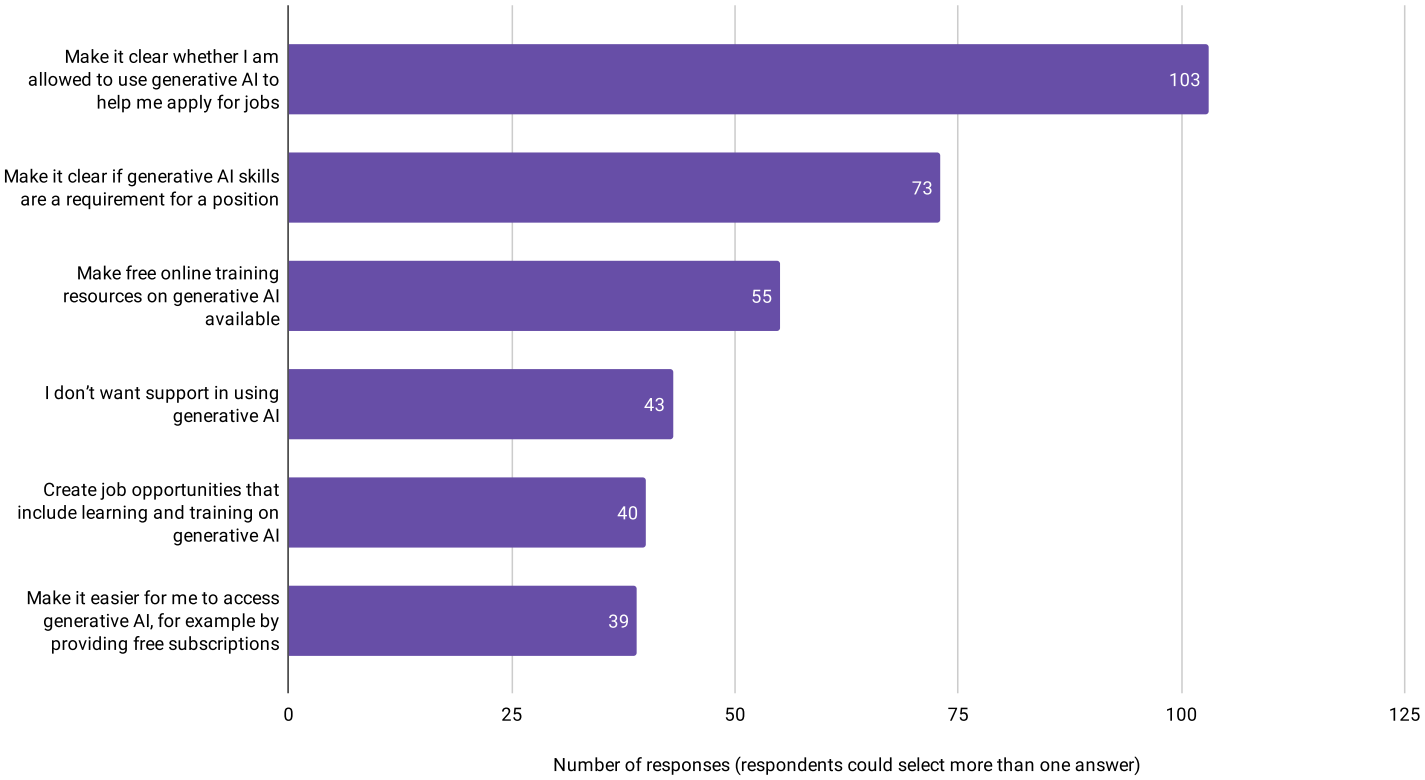
[18] Wood, Poppy, 'Oxford and Cambridge ban ChatGPT over plagiarism fears but other universities choose to embrace AI bot', i News, 28 February 2023, https://inews.co.uk/news/oxford-cambridge-ban-chatgpt-plagiarism-universities-2178391?srsltid=AfmBOoqcqZbTmhX63S7auZgr3gCFCWUHcwJcFmV3ac6c-qwLvuZFoh_h. For examples of university misconduct policies addressing gen AI use, see: The Open University, 'Generative AI for students', https://about.open.ac.uk/policies-and-reports/policies-and-statements/gen-ai/generative-ai-students; University College London, 'Using AI tools in assessment', https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/generative-ai-hub/using-ai-tools-assessment; University of Oxford, 'Plagiarism', https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism; University of Cambridge, 'Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct: Artificial Intelligence', https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/what-academic-misconduct/artificial-intelligence

Employers can support young people who are NEET in using gen AI

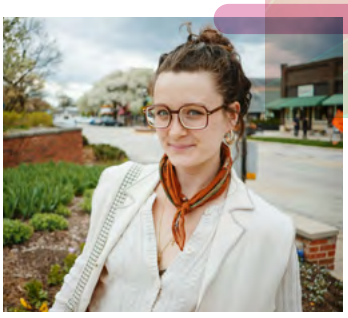
Around a quarter of respondents who have not used gen AI also stated that it was because they did not know how to use it (25%) or because they did not have access to gen AI tools (23.4%). Ensuring NEET young people have the tools and opportunities to access gen AI is fundamental to level the playing field.

When asked about how employers can support their use of gen AI, survey respondents indicated that the main thing that employers can do is be clear about whether candidates are allowed to use gen AI in the application process, and whether gen AI is a required skill for the role. Respondents also indicate being interested in free training resources on gen AI, and support to access gen AI tools.

What could potential employers do to support you using generative AI?



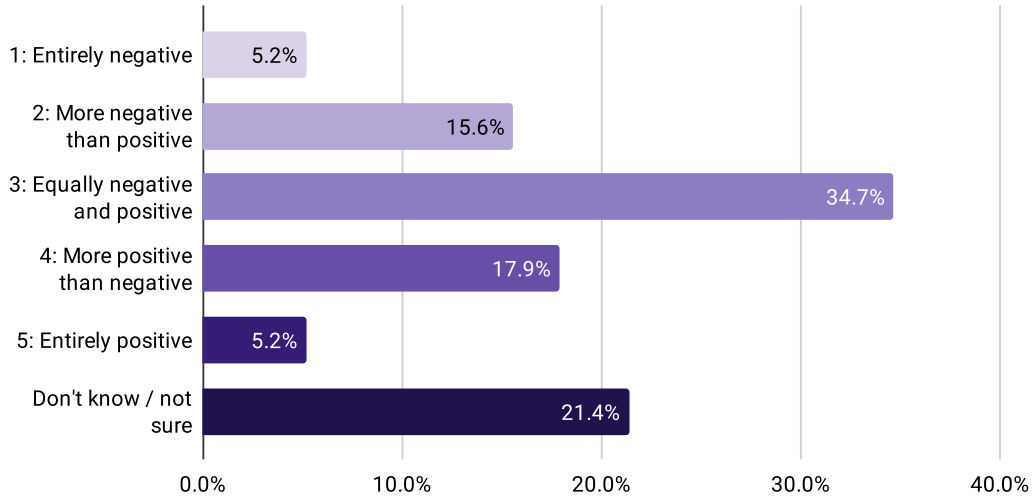
Respondents were able to select more than one answer to this question. 173 respondents answered this question.



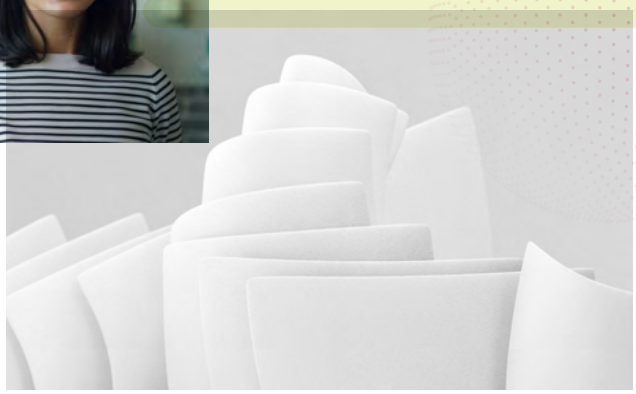
NEET young people have mixed views on the role of gen AI in their future and career, and many do not appear to have a firm opinion yet.

Respondents shared divided opinions on the role of gen AI in the future. When asked about the impact of gen AI on the job market, the most common response was ‘equally negative and positive’. The amount of respondents who think the impacts would be positive was just slightly higher than those who thought it would be negative.

I think the overall impacts of generative AI on the job market will be:

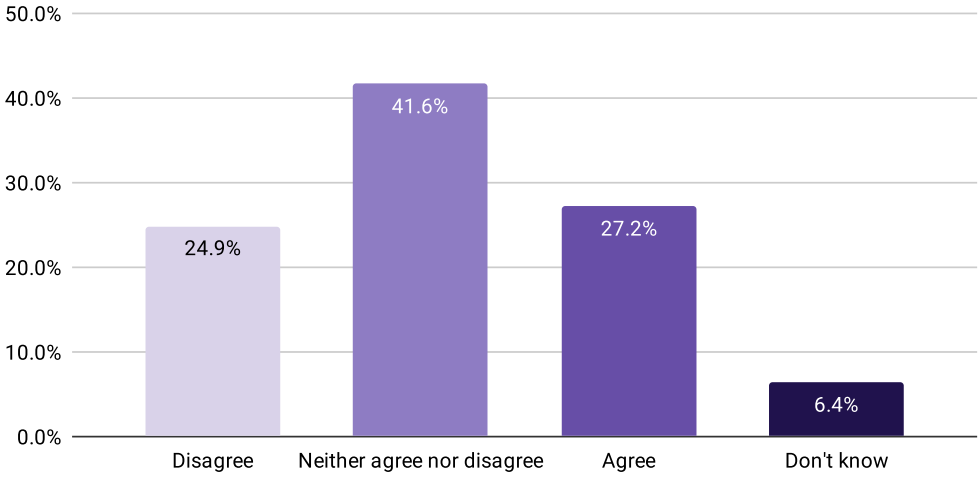


Survey respondents’ opinions on the impacts of gen AI on the job market. 173 respondents answered this question



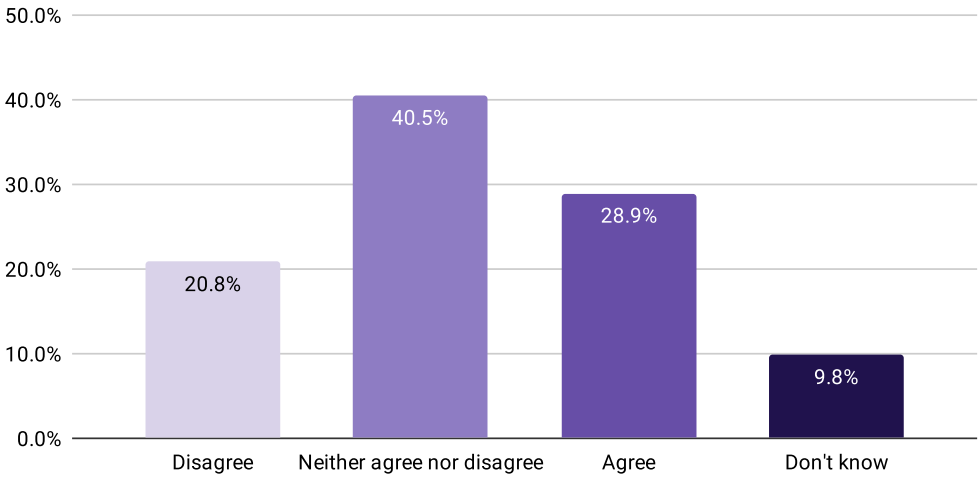
NEET young people also have mixed opinions on the future of gen AI in their own careers.

I would like to have a job or career that uses generative AI tools.



Survey respondents' opinions of the statement, 'I would like to have a job or career that uses gen AI tools.' 173 respondents answered this question. For this visualisation, different levels of agreement ('strongly agree' and 'agree') and disagreement ('strongly disagree' and 'disagree') were combined.

I think generative AI skills will be essential in my futue job or career.



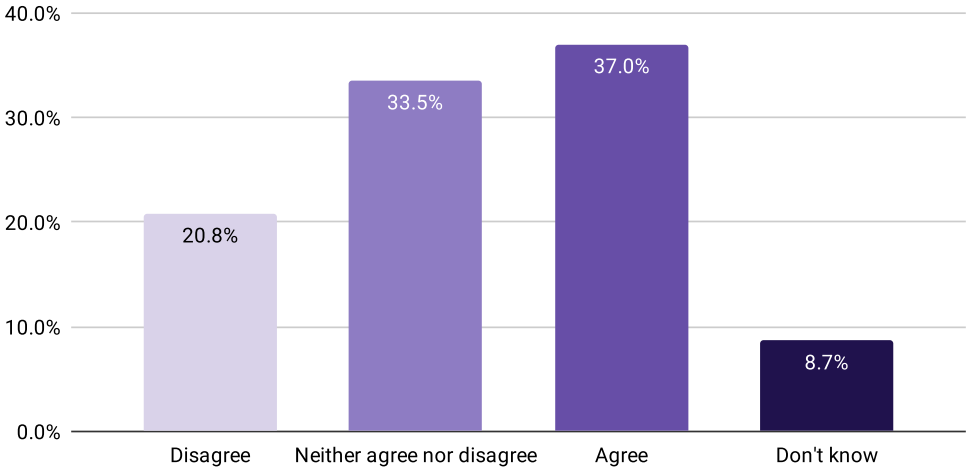
Survey respondents' opinions of the statement, 'I think gen AI skills will be essential in my future job or career.' 173 respondents answered this question. For this visualisation, different levels of agreement ('strongly agree' and 'agree') and disagreement ('strongly disagree' and 'disagree') were combined.

'Neither agree nor disagree' was by far the most common response when respondents were asked about whether they would like to have a career that uses gen AI (41.6%) and whether they think gen AI skills will be essential in their job or career (40.5%).

These findings become slightly more positive toward gen AI when asked about the job application process. When asked whether having gen AI skills would make it easier to apply for a job, 37% of young people surveyed agreed, compared to 33.5% who neither agreed nor disagreed. Similarly, when asked whether having gen AI skills would make it easier to get a job, 30.1% agreed compared to 34.1% who neither agreed nor disagreed.

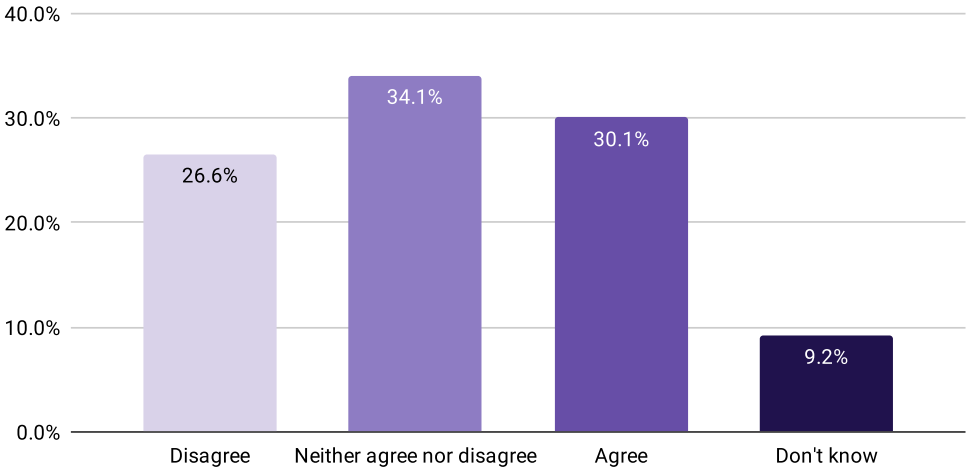
37% of young people surveyed agreed having gen AI skills would make it easier to apply for a job

I think having gen AI skills would make it easier for me to apply for a job.



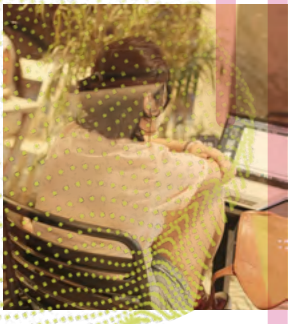
Survey respondents' opinions of the statement, 'I think having gen AI skills would make it easier for me to apply for a job.' 173 respondents answered this question. For this visualisation, different levels of agreement ('strongly agree' and 'agree') and disagreement ('strongly disagree' and 'disagree') were combined.

I think having gen AI skills would make it easier for me to get a job.



Survey respondents' opinions of the statement, 'I think having gen AI skills would make it easier for me to get a job.' 173 respondents answered this question. For this visualisation, different levels of agreement ('strongly agree' and 'agree') and disagreement ('strongly disagree' and 'disagree') were combined.

In the workshops, some participants who expressed an opinion on gen AI were quite willing to change it when given new information, for example by another participant or after viewing a demonstration. This suggests that some opinions of the technology may be open to change following more in-depth engagement.



What do hiring processes look like in the age of gen AI?

Most employers are not concerned by candidates using gen AI responsibly in the job application process.

While young people are concerned about employers penalising them for using gen AI skills, employers are generally not concerned about applicants using gen AI, and consider it no different from other tools, such as online templates or grammar checking software.

Recruiters also encouraged candidates to use gen AI tools to improve their applications, and discouraged client companies from penalising candidates for any suspected use of gen AI.

Employers and recruiters did point out instances of unskilled or irresponsible use of gen AI as something that would penalise candidates. For instance, candidates relying on gen AI to write entire, unedited, applications, or accidentally including prompts or placeholder text like [your name here].

Employers are **generally not concerned** about applicants using gen AI

In a few specific cases, employers raised concerns about the use of gen AI making some hiring processes less effective.

Employers generally had no issues with candidates using gen AI to support the writing of CVs or cover letters.

Still, a few did express concerns about candidates using gen AI in other parts of their applications. **Employers who use skills-based assessments were concerned about applicants using gen AI to get the right answers**, for instance, to demonstrate programming skills. Some employers expressed concerns that heavy use of gen AI could take the personality out of candidates’ statements, and affect the results of psychometric tests. Others mentioned reducing the number of interviews online in favour of in-person ones to encourage thoughtful and personal responses.

These employers expressed concerns primarily from the perspective of novel gen AI use cases making their hiring processes less robust and harder to assess. **Most employers interviewed are just beginning to discuss gen AI in the application process, and have no set policies around it yet**. Having policies clearly indicating when and how it is appropriate for candidates to use gen AI, and sharing them with candidates, will help create a fairer and more transparent hiring process.

Levelling the playing field: ensuring young people who are NEET have the skills and tools to succeed

Gen AI can help NEET young people address their challenges

Gen AI can alleviate many of the challenges that young people who are NEET reported facing when looking to access entry-level roles.

As employers are open to candidates using gen AI responsibly, NEET **young people have an opportunity to use a tool** that can improve their experience of the job search and alleviate some of its negative impact on young people's mental health. Below, we provide a list of key use cases that are directly linked to the challenges discussed on page **19-22**.

Type of challenge	Challenge	Gen AI use cases
Core	Length and complexity of the application process	**Speed up the application process** by reducing the time and effort required from some of the most repetitive tasks, such as tailoring CVs and cover letters.
Searching for and applying to jobs	Finding the right jobs that match a candidate's skill set	**Identify and consider roles** NEET young people have not considered or are not aware of and align with their skillset.
	Unclear and confusing language in job specifications and requirements	**Clarify language** and **what is involved in a role**, by describing the role and common scenarios related to it. **Research and learn more about a role or employer,** for instance company culture and what they are looking for in an entry-level candidate.
Writing applications	Understanding what to include in an application (e.g, CV/cover letter), specifically when there is no work experience	Provide advice on **what to include in an application (e.g, CV/cover letter)** when the candidate has no previous work experience, especially **articulating relevant transferable skills and experience.**
	Long written applications, particularly disadvantaging young people with learning disabilities	**Facilitate writing and summarise large bodies of text into a more digestible format**, such as bullet points. Act as **proofreader**, improving grammar, phrasing, and word choice, which can be particularly useful to non-native English speakers.
Interviewing	Managing stress, anxiety, and nerves	Produce **interview questions** to prepare for interviews, and create **mock interviews**.

What skills will NEET young people need?

Employers are starting to think about what gen AI means for their workplaces

Employers are only just starting to have internal discussions about how gen AI will impact entry-level roles in their organisation. The recruiters we spoke to confirmed seeing this trend with their clients, and having these conversations themselves as employers.

While most employers report that gen AI skills have not made their way to job descriptions for entry level roles yet, this is likely to change in the near future. Recruiters and employers from the banking, technology, and knowledge sectors in particular expect this to change in the next 3 to 5 years.

As employers reflect on how gen AI will change the skills required for entry level roles, it is fundamental that NEET young people have the tools and opportunities to build a skillset fit to succeed in the future of work.

It is fundamental that NEET young people have the **tools and opportunities to build a skillset** fit to succeed in the future of work.

What skills are employers looking for?

In particular, recruiters and knowledge workers expect an increase in skills that best complement the use of gen AI, such as digital skills, adaptability, being comfortable with technology, and strategic thinking.

Skills that complement the use of gen AI are becoming increasingly valuable.

In sectors from hospitality to finance and roles from receptionist to metalworker, employers consistently listed similar skills and qualities as those they valued most in entry-level workers. These traits included communication skills, resilience, adaptability to change, team working skills, digital skills, and the ability to receive and implement feedback. Employers also emphasised the need for workers who are agile, curious, and willing to take the initiative to consider ways for the business to improve. As a recruiter put it, '[At] the speed in which we see change, and as an organisation that needs to be ahead of the curve, and beat competition — we need someone who asks questions.'

Employers and recruiters see the responsible use of gen AI as an indicator of employable skills.

Regardless of whether the job would include using gen AI tools, many employers across sectors said that **being aware of gen AI and knowing how to use it tells them that a candidate is creative, innovative, agile, and curious**. Recruiters in particular viewed the use of gen AI to support the development of a job application as a sign of good problem solving skills, resourcefulness, innovative thinking, and curiosity, and they encouraged their client companies to think the same way.

Employers also explained that because gen AI is new to them and not yet embedded in many business areas, they appreciate candidates who bring an awareness of gen AI and how it can be used, and can help them navigate the changes brought about by it. Employers expressed valuing candidates who could suggest new ways of using gen AI to improve efficiency and free up time for more human tasks. This is not news: many employers value young workers with diverse backgrounds and ways of thinking and a willingness to suggest new and better ways of doing things. The same reasoning applies to gen AI: as the world of work changes, employers are looking for curious candidates who can help them navigate it and shape their business' approach to innovation.

Gen AI skills for empowering NEET young people

To young people not in education, employment, or training, Gen AI can understandably feel like a daunting and complex prospect – especially as two-thirds of business leaders now say they would not hire someone without AI skills[1]. Part of this concern revolves around the myth that AI demands a highly technical skillset reserved for those who work in technology or computer science. But as this first-of-its-kind research shows, the advent of AI in the workplace represents a significant opportunity for young people to thrive, from securing their first roles, to learning new skills, and building the foundations for successful careers.

This opportunity presents itself in broadly two ways: enhancing young people's prospects on the one hand and putting a renewed focus on increasingly sought-after soft skills on the other.

1. Generative AI will put power into the hands of young people,

helping them overcome barriers to the early stages of their careers or education like never before. We have identified how generative AI tools can help candidates prepare for interview scenarios, enhance written tasks, and speed up their research. Generative AI innovations like GitHub Copilot are also making natural language interactions more accessible by turning practical intentions into complex pieces of software. In other words, individuals no longer need a PhD in computer science to develop technical capabilities: AI is here to help with the journey.

2. AI is an opportunity to nurture and develop soft skills,

skills that young people might not necessarily associate with or expect from AI, but will become more important in the future. Employers are increasingly recognising the value of essential soft skills that improve human interaction and nurture people-centred cultures in the workplace[2]. Alongside AI, analytical and creative thinking are the top-ranking priorities in company training strategies, demonstrating the importance of developing these faculties in tandem. This report finds that employers are taking a holistic approach. With many focussed on using AI to augment existing human skills, other respondents see using the technology as an indicator of valued qualities such as curiosity, resourcefulness, and adaptability.

Section co-authored by:

Microsoft accenture

As AI takes on more routine tasks, the uniquely human qualities that cannot be easily automated will become the differentiating factors for success in the workforce. We will all need to focus on qualities like empathy, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking.

It is essential that organisations across the public and private sectors work together to ensure this group of young people have access to learning pathways such as LinkedIn's Career Essentials in Generative AI and Accenture's Skills to Succeed Initiative, especially as business leaders turn their sights to non-technical talent with AI aptitude[3]. By prioritising chances for young people to develop proficiency in AI and ensuring trusted advisors champion soft skills, we can help deliver a more level playing field by supporting inclusive hiring and tapping into a wider pool of talent.

We all risk foregoing the skills, ingenuity, and perspectives of these young people if we cannot help them realise the incredible benefits that AI is having on how we work: how we find jobs, how we collaborate with each other, and how we express our creativity.

[1] AI at Work Is Here. Now Comes the Hard Part - https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/ai-at-work-is-here-now-comes-the-hard-part
[2] Competencies Needed by Business Professionals in the AI Age: Character and Communication Lead the Way - https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23294906231208166
[3] The Future of Jobs Report 2023 | World Economic Forum - https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023/digest/

The main challenges NEET young people face in accessing employment are due to the hiring process

Many of the challenges NEET young people face cannot be solved solely by young people using technology.

The lack of feedback, high requirements, burdensome financial and time commitments, and mental toll that the job search takes on NEET young people are challenges that need to be addressed structurally in hiring processes.

'There's a fair bit of work to do about **candidate experience**'

Recruiter

Many of these challenges can be eased by increasing the transparency of employers' hiring processes.

'If we don't give candidates a good experience, **it damages our brand identity**'

Employer

From describing how applications will be reviewed, to providing updates and feedback, clearer, more transparent, and two-way communication can support NEET young people in the job search. This is not only the right thing to do for young people; it is the right thing to do from a business perspective. As a large hospitality employer said, candidates are potential customers. A bad candidate experience reflects on the company's branding and reputation.

Employers have little to lose from being candid about their processes. More transparency and communication can help heal the relationship between employers and candidates.

Different hiring practices might better support NEET young people

Some employers across sectors are also moving toward potential and skills-based hiring, and away from hiring solely on experience or qualifications for entry-level roles. Several of the employers we spoke to no longer require CVs or cover letters for entry-level positions, instead assessing candidates through skills assessments, psychometric tests, or competency-based interviews. Employers and recruiters explained that these processes better fit their business needs and allow them to find new talent, potentially in unexpected places.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to hiring. The key is to fit the hiring process to the role by carefully considering the skills and qualities needed and then shaping the application process accordingly. Shaping the hiring process in this way also benefits candidates, as it helps them assess whether they would actually enjoy and excel in the role. **The employers' guide contains more information on how employers can support NEET young people.**

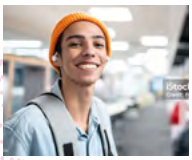
Recommendations

For employers

Employers should be clear about when applicants can or cannot use gen AI tools.

While allowing candidates to use gen AI tools can support them in the job search, it might not work for every type of hiring process, such as technical assessments. Employers should create clear policies on the use of gen AI in applications, and share them with applicants in the job application instructions. Employers should also consider addressing the question in a creative way; for example, asking applicants that use gen AI to share the prompts they used.

Employers **should provide transparency** on where gen AI can be used



Employers can provide NEET young people with access to gen AI tools.

Support NEET young people with **training on how to use gen AI responsibly**

And support them by providing free training on how to use gen AI responsibly in their daily lives. Movement to Work can support employers with access to gen AI training and dedicated work experience programmes for NEET young people.

Employers should **identify the key gen AI skills they will need in the future and support access to learning pathways and resources** that will benefit NEET young people. As employers reflect on the key skills needed for the next 3 to 5 years, they need to support young people to build the skillset to succeed. Employers can engage with youth organisations such as The Prince's Trust to ensure that young people have a chance to build these skills, for instance, creating skill building programmes or hosting workshops. This practice will support NEET young people while ensuring employers have the skilled workforce they need for the future.

Recommendations

For employers

Alleviate the challenges that NEET young people face

Employers should ensure that their hiring processes alleviate the challenges that NEET young people face. Employers can **increase transparency and accessibility and minimise entry requirements**. This may include providing more detailed information about how applications are reviewed, explaining what reasonable adjustments are available to applicants, and considering whether qualifications are truly necessary for a role.

The Employers' Guide contains more information on how employers can support NEET young people in their hiring processes.

Download the Emplyers' Guide here.

Providing detailed information **alleviates some of the challenges** faced

Explore using gen AI to provide personalised feedback

Providing feedback offers candidates the chance to improve their applications

Employers can also explore using gen AI to provide personalised feedback to candidates when there are high application volumes. For instance, employers can enter notes from unsuccessful interviews or CVs into a generative text tool to rapidly turn these into candidate-focused feedback. Employers can also explore ways to integrate such functions into their current systems, to increase efficiency and speed up the process even more.

While some NEET young people find machine-generated replies disheartening, many also recognise how high application volumes might make automation necessary. Using gen AI to provide feedback can help employers in ensuring that all young candidates receive constructive feedback, offering them the chance to improve their applications, even when there are high application volumes.

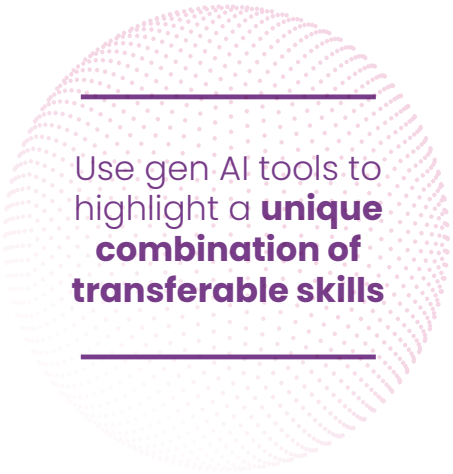
Recommendations

For young people who are NEET

Explore how and when gen AI might be helpful

NEET young people can explore use cases of gen AI that might support them in accessing jobs, starting with the job application process.

They can also build confidence with the use of gen AI, learning to use gen AI tools responsibly to increase their creativity and individuality while addressing some of the practical challenges posed by a lack of work experience. For instance, NEET young people can use gen AI tools to highlight their unique combination of transferable skills and personal attributes throughout the application process, from CVs to interview questions. **Movement to Work will support this** by compiling free training and access to trustworthy educational resources.



For policymakers

We need a more comprehensive approach to gen AI

Government and the education system need to develop a more comprehensive approach to gen AI to help young people responsibly use it in their careers.

While some secondary schools and universities initially banned gen AI tools, many now recognise its potential to help young people learn, and have developed more nuanced approaches. For instance, the Russell Group of top UK research universities have agreed to five principles focused on supporting students to become AI literate.[19] Government and educational institutions should **maintain these efforts**, so that young people have a chance to learn to use gen AI responsibly, appropriately, and efficiently in a protected environment. This will enable them to use gen AI responsibly in their careers and actively contribute to shaping the future of work.

Government and educational institutions should also **expand on existing guidance on gen AI**, which largely focuses on secondary and tertiary education[20] to include consideration of NEET young people. This may mean, for instance, offering gen AI literacy courses to NEET young people outside of the traditional education system. It is vital that all young people are AI literate and are able to use gen AI responsibly.

[19] Russell Group, 'New principles on use of AI in education,' 4 July 2023, https://russellgroup.ac.uk/news/new-principles-on-use-of-ai-in-education/

[20] See: Department for Education, 'Generative artificial intelligence (AI) in education', 26 October 2023, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/generative-artificial-intelligence-in-education/generative-artificial-intelligence-ai-in-education. Ofqual, 'Ofqual's approach to regulating the use of artificial intelligence in the qualifications sector', 24 April 2024, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-approach-to-regulating-the-use-of-artificial-intelligence-in-the-qualifications-sector/ofquals-approach-to-regulating-the-use-of-artificial-intelligence-in-the-qualifications-sector. Joint Council for Qualifications, 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications', 2 February 2024, Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications', 2 February 2024, https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice/artificial-intelligence/.

Methodology

Workshops

We conducted in-person workshops with the support of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in Youth Hubs across the country.

Youth Hub workshops allowed us to converse with young people in person and informally, in an environment that they were already familiar with. We chose a workshop approach to gather personal and emotionally rich insights in a context in which the presence of peers would give people expressive confidence; this method is also more time-efficient than a series of one-on-one interviews[21]. In total, 37 young people participated in the workshops.

We sought to hold workshops in a diverse mix of regions around the UK. Regions were selected with the DWP's support based on the highest population of NEET young people. The DWP contacted Youth Hubs in each region and suggested key Youth Hubs that would have availability for the research. Ultimately, we conducted 6 in-person workshops in Youth Hubs in:

- **South Shields - North East of England**
- **The Wirral - North West of England**
- **Birmingham - West Midlands of England**
- **Barking - London**
- **Bristol - South West England**
- **Glasgow - Scotland**

We used the workshops to gather in-depth qualitative insights from young people who had been NEET for more than six months, to gather the perspective of those further away from the job market. The 2-hour workshops engaged a small number of young people who are NEET (5 to 7 people per workshop) to allow us to personally engage with each participant. We relied on the support of Youth Hubs to identify and invite participants with the following characteristics:

- between 16-30 years old, as this is the population served by Movement to Work's programmes[22];
- had not been in education, employment, or training for at least 6 months, to ensure we discussed the challenges faced by those who had been consistently struggling to enter employment. This differed from the survey, where criteria only specified that the participants were NEET at the time of the survey.
- had been looking for opportunities for employment and were able to talk about the challenges they had encountered; and,
- constituted a diverse mix in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and background. Due to the small size of each workshop, we did not create any strict targets for these characteristics, but rather sought to understand as many different perspectives as possible.

[21] See e.g. Bella Martin and Bruce Hanington, 'Focus Groups', in: Universal Methods of Design. Beverley, MA: Rockport Publishers, pp.118-119, 2019.
[22] DWP customers in the Youth Hubs are aged 16 to 24 years old. However, because Movement to Work's target audience is 16 to 30-year-olds, Youth Hubs also invited participants from the 25 to 30 age group.

The support of the Youth Hubs was fundamental to ensure that we engaged a diverse set of young people with different backgrounds, experiences, and needs.

While we aimed to obtain a diverse array of perspectives, the goal of the workshops was not to gain a nationally representative sample, but rather to delve further into the opinions and experiences of young people who are NEET.

Each workshop focused on understanding the barriers to employment for young people who are NEET; understanding NEET young people's awareness of gen AI tools and whether they currently use them to apply for jobs; and their interest and potential in using gen AI tools to tackle the barriers they face to entering employment.

The workshops were delivered by an Oxford Insights researcher and a representative from Movement to Work. To ensure consistency across workshops, Oxford Insights representatives followed a standardised workshop guide that included the same questions and talking points for each workshop, and reported all findings in standardised templates for the research team to analyse.

Interviews

We conducted remote, semi-structured interviews with HR representatives from large employers (several hundred to several hundred thousand employees), to investigate in depth their expectations of future employees' skills profiles and to explore their hiring practices. The employers were selected by Movement to Work from its network based on availability and diversity of sector and size. We interviewed eight large employers from a diverse range of sectors to ensure that findings were not skewed by sector-specific requirements for entry level roles.

Sector	No. of employers
Retail	2
Hospitality	1
Banking	1
Manufacturing	1
Knowledge sector	2
Construction	1

In addition to the employers, we conducted interviews with representatives of 2 recruitment agencies that are part of the Movement to Work network in order to understand their perspectives and any points we might have missed by speaking solely to potential employers of young people who are NEET.

Survey

We created a survey to gather quantitative information on a broader sample of individuals than time-intensive interviews and workshops allow.

The survey **targeted young people (16 to 30 years old) who were not in education, employment, or training at the time of the survey**. The survey was distributed via Google Forms, and all data has been handled in compliance with GDPR. In total, we received 173 valid responses.

During the survey and the workshops, we provided young people with a summarised definition of gen AI, reported below:

> Generative AI is a fast-developing area in artificial intelligence that allows computers to create things like videos, text, pictures, sounds, and even computer code. **Examples of generative AI include the text generator ChatGPT and image generators like DALL-E and Midjourney**.

The accompanying Annex reports all the survey questions in detail.
We organised the survey around 4 sections:

- **Screening questions**, to ensure that the respondent was (1) a young person aged 16-30 years old, (2) NEET at the time of the survey, and (3) lived in the UK at the time of the survey;
- **Barriers to employment**, to understand where in the application process young people who are NEET face the most difficulties;
- **Attitudes toward and uses of generative AI**;
- **Demographic information**, capturing the participants' contextual and background information.

After completing the survey, respondents were given the option to participate in a prize draw and access learning resources on generative AI.

Sample and dissemination

The survey was shared with the support of the **Department for Work and Pensions, GetMyFirstJob, and Movement to Work's partners** to ensure higher take up rates. These organisations shared the survey with their audiences via email, social media, advertisements on their websites, and printed QR codes for young people to see in person in some cases. As the survey was disseminated digitally, we recognise that respondents may be a limited sample of young people who are NEET, for instance, those with higher digital skills, a personal device, or easier access to an internet connection. This means that they may be more likely to use or be aware of gen AI. The engagement with DWP and the Youth Hubs helped to mitigate these risks, as they provided support for NEET young people in completing the survey, including providing access to their technology.

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