

MOVEMENT
TO WORK



Levelling the playing field

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

↳ **Employers' Guide**

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Between June and August 2024, Movement to Work and Oxford Insights conducted research aimed at understanding the impact of generative AI (gen AI) on young people (16–30 years old) not in education, employment, or training (NEET) seeking entry level jobs.

As employers determine how to deploy gen AI, it is vital we ensure no young person is left behind. As of August 2024, the UK has at least 872,000 young people who are currently NEET.¹ We must ensure these young people have the skills and support they need to succeed in a job market that will be impacted by gen AI.

This employers' guide focuses on how employers can improve their hiring processes to support NEET young people in accessing employment in a world of work shaped by gen AI.

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

While gen AI can be a helpful tool for NEET young people to use, many of their challenges in accessing employment are due to the structure of hiring processes, and cannot be solved only with young people using technology. Employers have the opportunity to be leaders in inclusive hiring and ensure that their processes allow valuable potential talent to come in.

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.

Many, though not all, of these challenges can be eased by increasing the transparency of employers' hiring processes. From describing how applications will be reviewed to providing updates and feedback, clearer, more transparent, and two-way communication can better 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.

On the contrary, employers can only gain from the successes of NEET young people in the job market.

The research report discusses in more depth how gen AI can support young people in the future of work. Here, we discuss how employers can support NEET young people, through:

1. Directly alleviating many of the challenges faced by NEET young people;
2. Supporting NEET young people in accessing gen AI to make the job application process easier and build skills for the future.

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

Recruiter

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

Employer

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>

↘ Young people who are NEET face three core challenges

In the workshops and survey we conducted, we asked NEET young people to share the challenges that they face when trying to access entry-level roles. Participants consistently reported these challenges to us, regardless of location, age, gender, level of education, and sectors they were applying to.

1. Lack of responses or feedback from employers

This is the single challenge young people highlighted the most. When asked to select the 3 most common outcomes of their applications, 78.5% of those who responded selected sending in an application and never hearing back from the employer.

NEET young people described the lack of updates and feedback as 'demotivating' and 'draining', and making them 'feel exhausted' and 'hopeless'.²

2. Job requirements that are unrealistic for entry level roles

61.7% of survey respondents cited lack of experience as the most common factor making it more difficult for them to get a job.

This was confirmed in the workshops, as participants highlighted how jobs that are advertised as entry-level often require previous work experience or strict requirements in terms of qualifications that require significant time and financial investment.

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

In every workshop we conducted, 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.

23.6% of survey respondents identified mental health challenges as a factor that has made it more difficult for them to find employment.

² Direct quotes from workshop participants



↘ And many application step-specific challenges

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In addition to the core challenges listed above, which were reported across all stages of the application process, NEET young people also shared many challenges related to specific steps of the application process. These are reported below, divided into the 3 application steps: searching for and finding jobs to apply to; writing applications; and interviewing.

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 for 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 an application (e.g, CV/cover letter), specifically when candidates have no work experience.

Long written applications, particularly disadvantaging young people with learning disabilities. Applications often require considerable writing. Young people with learning disabilities reported feeling 'disadvantaged' by this when applying for jobs that they felt they were well suited for.

Providing references when candidates have 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, and have not been adapted to entry level roles.

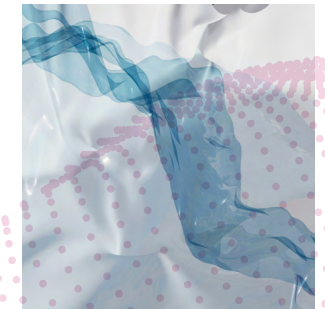
Taking pre-recorded video interviews. The lack of visual feedback, human interaction, and clarification questions affects young people's performance, who reported feeling more self-conscious and intimidated.

Unpaid trial shifts for periods as long as months.

How can employers support young people who are NEET?

Employers can directly alleviate many of the challenges faced by NEET young people. Below, we provide some practical examples of how employers can respond to the challenges faced by NEET young people.

Type of challenge	Challenge	Employers' support
Core	NEET young people rarely receive responses or feedback from prospective employers	Use automated responses to notify candidates, and use gen AI tools to provide feedback when there is a high volume of applications.
Core	Requirements that are not suitable for entry-level roles	Minimise requirements. Consider moving to skills-based hiring or hiring on potential (see case studies on pp. 7-8).
Core	Length and complexity of applications	Create shorter applications and minimise the steps required.
Searching for and finding jobs to apply to	Finding up-to-date jobs	Ensure that job adverts are kept up-to-date and deleted when filled.
	Unclear language	Ensure that language is accessible and does not require previous knowledge.
Writing applications	Long written applications disadvantaging young people with learning disabilities	Create shorter application processes that are fit for the role.
	Providing references without work experience	Avoid asking for references for entry-level roles.
Interviews	Inaccessible interview questions	Tailor interview questions to entry-level roles.
	Unpaid trial shifts	Ensure that NEET young people are paid for their work – with consideration to how this may conflict with welfare benefits.



↘ Different hiring practices might better support young people who are NEET in accessing work

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Some employers are moving toward potential and skills-based hiring, and away from hiring solely on experience or qualifications, especially for entry-level roles.

Employers across sectors are increasingly considering skills-based hiring. For entry level positions, several of the employers we spoke to no longer require candidates to submit CVs or cover letters, instead assessing them through skills assessments, psychometric tests, or interviews. Employers explained that these processes better fit their business needs and allowed them to find new talent, potentially in unexpected places.

Skills-based hiring looks different for different employers

Some employers require candidates to have specific skills or knowledge – for example, a certain level of mathematics. These employers often require candidates to take an assessment (typically online) before proceeding to interview. Other employers focus on hiring for potential rather than existing skills or abilities. These employers are more interested in candidates' personality traits or behaviours and might use tools like psychometric and scenario-based tests to assess whether a candidate is aligned with the employers' values.³ Competency-based interviews can also bring out these insights.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to hiring

More employers are seeking to fit the hiring process to the role by carefully considering the real 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 the role they are applying for is something they would actually enjoy and excel in.



Employers explained that these processes allowed them to find new talent, potentially in unexpected places.

³ It is important to note that some NEET young people reported finding psychometric tests intimidating and limiting their ability to showcase their personality. While deeper research into this topic was outside the scope of this project, employers should carefully test psychometric tests with NEET young people and other vulnerable groups before implementing them.

↘ Case study: No CV or cover letter

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One large retail employer stopped requiring CVs or cover letters for entry-level roles years ago. Instead, they ask candidates a few screening questions on eligibility and right to work, and then conduct a psychometric test that takes about 20 minutes. This test is designed to draw out how customer-focussed an applicant is, which is the main value the employer looks for in entry-level roles.

If the applicant passes the psychometric test, they are immediately sent to a scheduling portal to select an in-person interview slot at their local store. This in-person session also includes a shop floor exercise. The employer emphasised that this exercise was not only for the hiring manager to assess the candidate's abilities; it was equally important for the candidate to get a sense of what the role actually entailed, and whether it would be a good fit for them. This employer felt this process had a number of benefits for the business and candidates:

- **By not requiring CVs or cover letters, candidates are not asked to demonstrate writing skills that are not relevant to the role;**
- **The online process is relatively short, saving candidates time; and**
- **The in-person shop floor exercise allows the employer and candidates to more accurately judge whether they are well-suited for the role.**



↘ Case study: Experiential recruitment

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Two employers interviewed for this research created interesting programmes, in partnership with Movement to Work, to provide a different hiring process for NEET young people. These employers in construction and manufacturing created short, paid work experience programmes in which young people who are NEET actually work for the business alongside permanent employees of the company. After a few weeks, candidates are offered an interview for a permanent version of the position they have already been working in. The employer then makes the decision to hire or not based not only on the interview, but also the direct experience of working with that young person for a few weeks.

These employers reported many benefits of these programmes for both the business and for NEET young people, including:

- **Allowing hiring managers to make more informed hiring decisions, based on how the candidate has actually behaved in the role;**
- **Making interviews less nerve-racking for young people, as they have already met and worked with their interviewer;**
- **Even if they are not offered a position, young people gain valuable work experience that may help them apply for other roles.**



↘ Improving candidate experience also benefits employers

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One of the themes that clearly emerged from our engagement with NEET young people is the distrust that young people have towards prospective employers throughout the job application process. NEET young people shared an ‘us versus them’ mentality based on the assumption that employers do not care about candidates’ wellbeing. In fact, many employers are very thoughtful about their recruitment process, and care about creating an inclusive and positive experience.

The source of this distrust lies in a gap in communication between candidates and employers. NEET young people often find application processes unclear and confusing: what to include in a cover letter, what employers expect of them, and whether they can use gen AI in the application process. Such a gap in information is easy to fill with their own fears and concerns. In our conversations, young people have often stated that they are certain that employers only use AI to review their applications⁴, and that their work is never read by a human.

In reality, applications are very much, and very often, reviewed by humans. Only a low number of employers currently use AI systems to review job applications, and when AI – and automation in general – is present in the recruitment process, it is always accompanied by human oversight.

There is a strong mismatch between what young people think happens behind the curtain of recruitment, and what is actually happening. One recruiter linked this to bad candidate experiences, and the lack of feedback: ‘It’s the not hearing anything that makes people doubt whether it’s even being looked at.’ This distrust poisons the relationship between young people who are NEET and employers, ultimately damaging both.



⁴ Hays, ‘What Workers Want 2024: When applying for a job’, 2024, https://www.hays.co.uk/documents/d/global/market-insights-www-ai-application-process-2024?utm_source=microsite&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=www24

Employers can support NEET young people in accessing gen AI

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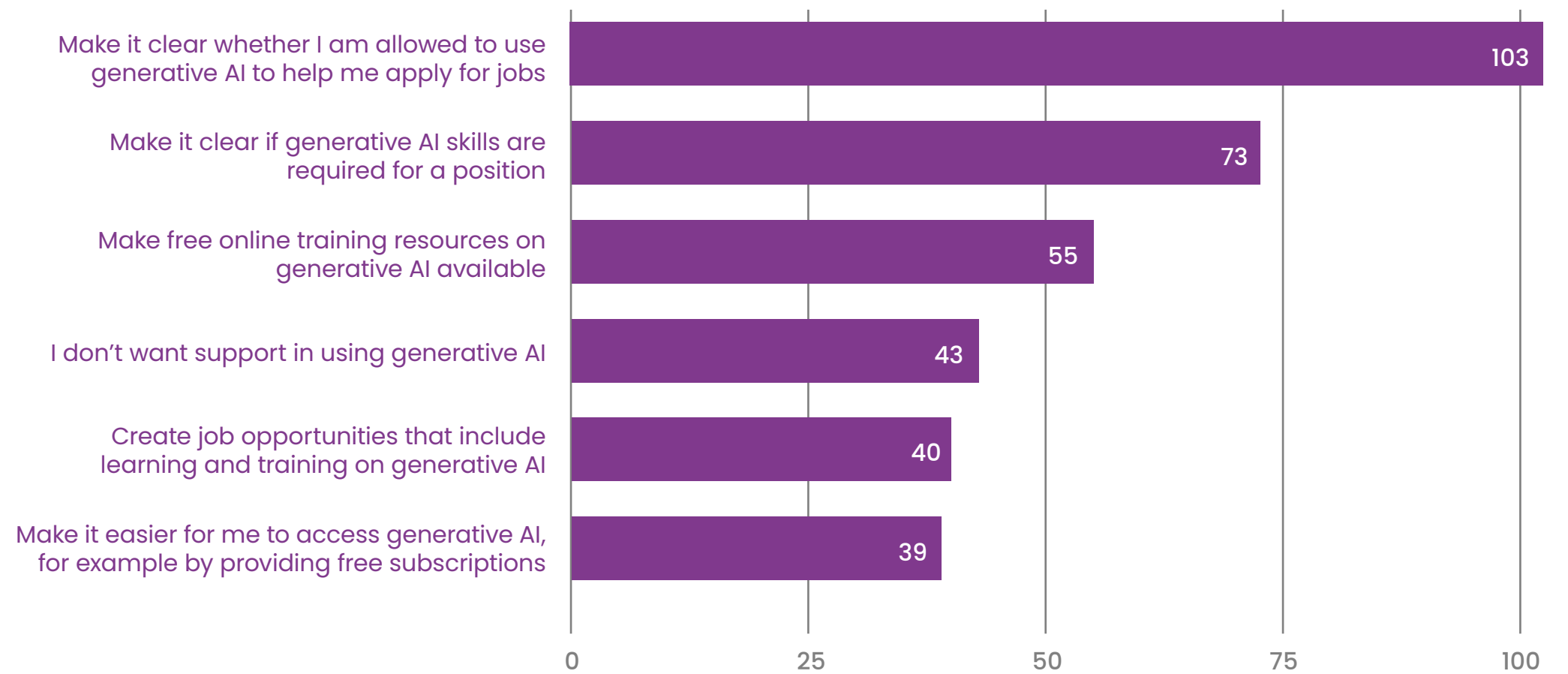
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Generative AI can help alleviate many of the challenges that NEET young people reported facing.⁵ In turn, employers can support young people who are NEET to access and use gen AI tools responsibly by:

- Making it clear when candidates are allowed to use generative AI in job applications;
- Making it clear if gen AI skills are a requirement for a position;
- Making free training resources on gen AI available;
- Making it easier to access gen AI, for example by providing free subscriptions;
- Creating job opportunities that include learning and training on generative AI.

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



Number of responses (respondents could select more than one answer)

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

⁵ See research report

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Employers can create hiring processes that alleviate many of the challenges that NEET young people face (p.3), and, at the same time, improve the relationship with candidates, widen the talent pool, and ensure that they select the best candidates for the role. Employers can:

1. Increase transparency and communication around the application process.

Update candidates on the status of their application, and notify them in case of an unsuccessful outcome. Automated notifications and replies can still support NEET young people. While some NEET young people find automated replies disheartening, many also recognise how high application volumes might make automation necessary, and how an automated reply is better than no reply at all.

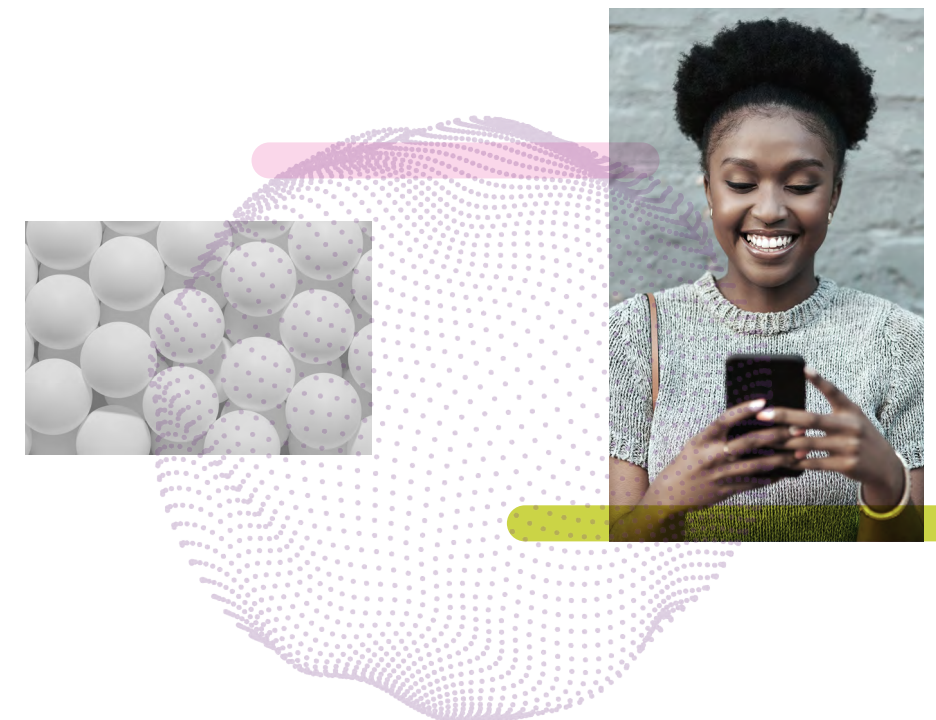
Provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates to help them improve. In case of high application volumes, consider alternative ways to provide feedback, such as reporting the top 3-5 reasons why candidates were unsuccessful across all applications. After interviews, tailored feedback should be the norm. Employers can also consider using gen AI to provide feedback to candidates effectively.

Be clear about when applicants can or cannot use gen AI tools. Allowing candidates to use gen AI tools can support them in the job search. Whether you want to allow candidates to use gen AI or not, clearly explain it in the application instructions⁶.

Tell candidates how their application will be reviewed, including timings and whether parts of the process are automated. Many young people are assuming that the hiring process involves much less human review than it actually does. Knowing how their application will be processed can build trust and confidence, and help them prepare to the best of their ability.

Use clear language without assuming previous knowledge. Language that might seem clear to a seasoned professional can sound obscure to a NEET young person. Carefully examine language and clarify any points that might be confusing, including job titles.

Provide information around how interviews will be structured to ease anxiety. Include information such as dress code, style of questions, and who will join. Some employers have found it useful to publicly share their interview questions⁷.



⁶ The research report contains further information on how gen AI can support NEET young people and how employers feel about candidates using gen AI.

⁷ Ely, Barney, 'In the news: should employers show interview questions in advance?' Hays, <https://www.hays.co.uk/market-insights/article/in-the-news-should-employers-show-interview-questions-in-advance->

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2. Create application processes that are more accessible to NEET young people. This means applications that:

Are shorter to complete to facilitate the process for all, and especially support young people who might have limited time due to health conditions, caring responsibilities, or other requirements.

Include reasonable adjustments, explaining clearly what these mean and the process to discuss them. Some employers have pre-planned adjustments, for instance, moving candidates directly to the interview stage. Others prefer to have a conversation with the candidate to understand how to support them. Ensuring clarity about who is eligible for adjustments, what these might be, and how candidates can receive them will support young people who are uncertain about whether these apply to them.

Cover expenses and pay young people for their time, including, for instance, covering travel expenses for in-person interviews and paying young people for trial shifts. Any consideration of remunerating NEET young people should be mindful of the impacts on those who are receiving welfare benefits, such as Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit.

3. Consider which requirements are truly necessary to be successful in the role

Is your hiring process fit for the role? Some job application processes highlight skills and attitudes that are not mirrored in the actual job. This can result in actively filtering out people who may underperform on the application but would succeed in the job. Ensuring that the skills assessed in the hiring process match those required in the job is vital to ensure that the right candidates can emerge.

Are CVs informative for the role? Some entry-level positions might not benefit from the information in a CV. CVs can also increase the risk of hiring biases, as they might make evident some indications of ethnicity, nationality, and financial status.

Should your hiring process focus on skills or potential? Some employers have discarded CVs and qualifications to focus on skills and competencies. There is a spectrum of possibilities in terms of skills-based hiring: it might include skill tests, competency-based interviews, or psychometric tests. These assessments can also help candidates understand whether the role is a fit for them.

Work with youth organisations to design the best processes for entry-level roles. Employers can collaborate with youth charities or organisations such as The Prince's Trust to create hiring processes that widen the talent pool and support NEET young people into work. For instance, pre-employment or work experience programmes might allow employers to reach a diverse pool of talent that they may not otherwise successfully engage, while allowing NEET young people to showcase their willingness to learn, capabilities, and adaptability in a practical way.



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The research has been conducted in partnership with The Prince's Trust and sponsored by Accenture, Microsoft, and GetMyFirstJob. The full report is available [here](#).



Movement to Work (MtW) helps employers deliver high-quality employability opportunities for young people aged 16–30 facing barriers to work. As a registered UK charity, MtW offers fully funded professional support to businesses interested in tackling youth unemployment. Since 2013, Movement to Work has helped deliver over 190,000 youth opportunities UK wide, resulting in positive outcomes for more than 89% of participants, who have gone on to secure further education, employment or training. MtW's mission is to help young people gain access to valuable work experiences and to expose organisations to diverse, untapped talent. For more information: www.movementtowork.com



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The findings of this research project result from 3 key activities:

- **A survey for young people** who are currently NEET on their experiences in the job application process, and their use of and attitudes towards gen AI. We received 173 valid survey responses.
- **Six in-person workshops** with NEET young people, delivered in Youth Hubs across the UK to gather in-depth, qualitative evidence about the challenges that participants face when applying for jobs, alongside their use of and interest in gen AI tools. In total, 37 young people attended the workshops.
- **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.