



# TOTALLY WASTED?

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**THE CRISIS OF YOUNG  
WOMEN'S WORKLESSNESS**

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# WHY WOMEN'S WORKLESSNESS MATTERS — THE HEADLINES

**It is my privilege and pleasure to introduce this important piece of work.**

The number of people in England not in education, employment or training (NEET) is high. However, despite common assumptions about who is NEET, there are **many more women than men** in this position and this has been the case for more than a decade. **Women are NEET for longer and the impact is deeper**, with the effects sometimes lasting for a lifetime.

But, as you will read in the following pages, **young women want to work**. They often cannot because **the advice, training and support they receive does not lead to any employment** or leads to highly competitive, poorly paid jobs in a limited range of occupations.

Contrary to popular assumptions, **only a quarter of women who are not in education, employment or training are mothers, but those who are, face even more barriers to working**.

**Young women who are NEET can be exploited**, just as men can. But a zero hours contract or a job paying under the minimum wage is harder to avoid or escape when you have fewer choices in the first place, and harder to cope with if you have children to provide for and look after.

**Women are stuck and they are stigmatised**. We shouldn't be willing to accept this. Economically too, it makes no sense to deny women who want to work the opportunity to do so.

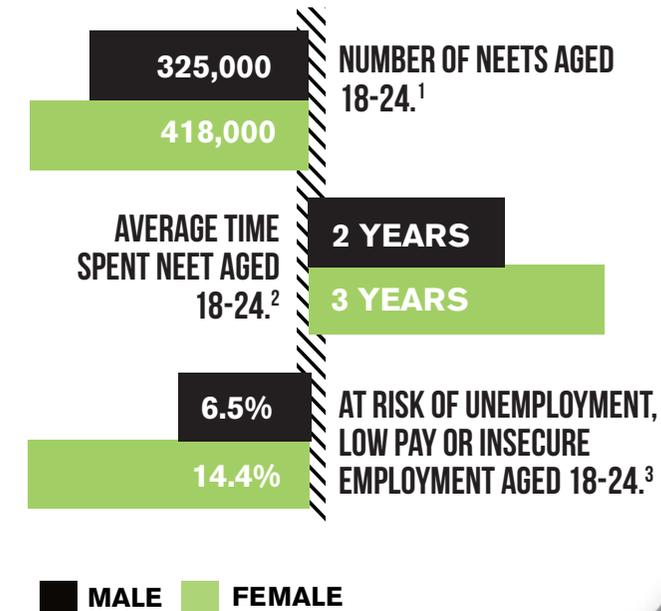
For too long, this issue has been denied the attention it deserves. Now though, thanks to Young Women's Trust, we hear first-hand from hundreds of women who are NEET about **what they think needs to change**.

**Sian Williams**  
Chair, Expert Advisory Panel, 'Scarred for Life' Inquiry

The following report is the outcome of the first phase of an Inquiry launched by Young Women's Trust in April 2014. A ComRes poll was commissioned, interviewing 859 English adults, aged 18-24, not in employment, education or training between the 10th and 28th July. This poll was funded by Starbucks. Unless otherwise stated, the statistics in this report: are derived from the poll mentioned above; refer to young women NEET; are based on figures for England only. Ten focus groups involving 60 women (24 of those women were aged 25-40) were carried out in the following locations: Barking, Blackburn, Blackpool, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Newcastle, Birmingham, Canterbury and central London. An online survey was also carried out by 90 women. The findings include input from a panel of experts (set out below), as well as a 30-member advisory panel of young women who have experience of being NEET.

# WHY WOMEN? NEETS IN NUMBERS

NEET = Not in Education, Employment or Training



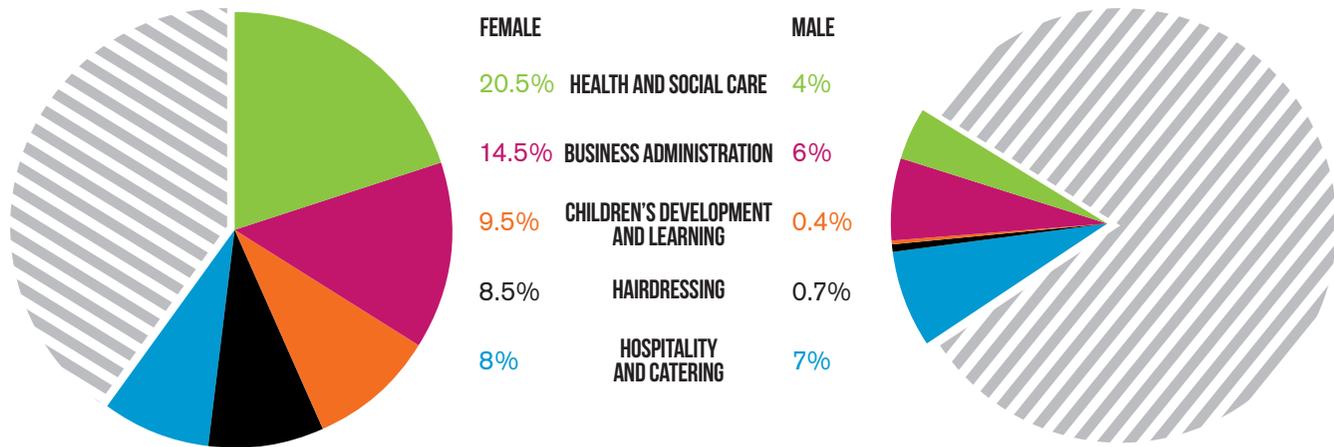
Since 2001 there have been, on average, **130,000 more young women NEETs per annum than young men**.

**Kamara, 18, Southeast London**



**Uptake of apprenticeships:**

There is a much narrower choice for women in sectors likely to lead to highly competitive jobs with low pay.<sup>4</sup>



These account for 61% of all female apprenticeships

These account for 18% of all male apprenticeships

61% of female apprentices work in just five sectors, whilst the same proportion of men work in more than 10 sectors.

**Number of vacancies against qualifications.<sup>5</sup>**

**APPROXIMATELY 2 JOBS**  
FOR EACH QUALIFIED CONSTRUCTION WORKER

**5 QUALIFIED PRACTITIONERS**  
FOR EACH JOB IN HAIR AND BEAUTY

**Cost to government of female NEETs.<sup>6</sup>**

**£926 MILLION**  
PER ANNUM IN LOST TAX  
AND COST OF BENEFITS

**£2.6 BILLION**  
IN LOST PRODUCTIVITY OF FEMALES

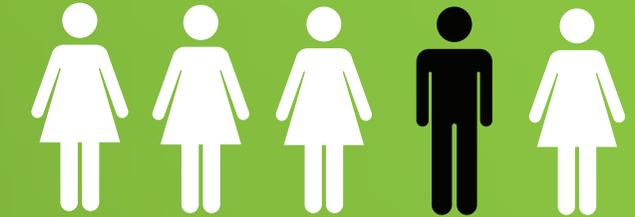
Lavonne, 24, North London & Leah, 19, Hertfordshire

Young people are at greater risk of unemployment than any other age group.<sup>7</sup>

**14.9%**  
YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT (AGED 18-24)

**4.8%**  
ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT (AGED 25-64)

Among those who have only had minimum wage jobs in the last ten years, almost four in five (79 per cent/110,000 workers) are women.<sup>8</sup>



**ONLY 24% OF**  
**NEET YOUNG**  
**WOMEN AGED**  
**18-24 ARE**  
**MOTHERS**



# NEET YOUNG WOMEN – WHAT THEY SAY

## SHE WANTS TO WORK

**She has ambition to find work or study, but cannot figure out a way to do so.**

**95%** say getting a paid job is important to them.

**43%** say they would take almost any job offered to them that paid more than they would receive in benefits.

**“I don’t have the skills I need to do the job I want.” (18, Plymouth)**

**“I have done training before, but it hasn’t helped me get a job.” (24, Birmingham)**

**She has limited understanding and knowledge of the possibilities for education and employment, coupled with inadequate support or advice.**

**47%** of women did not find careers advice, provided at school or a Jobcentre, useful.

**“I don’t know what I want to do.” (18, Sunderland)**

**“I am uncertain about how to use my education to get into a career, particularly in the current economic climate.” (19, Manchester)**

**She has significant caring responsibilities, including caring for family members who are not her children AND she wants to work.**

**44%** say having a job that allowed them to combine working with caring for family members other than their own children was important to them.

They are almost **twice as likely** as male NEETs to have been prevented from either applying for or accepting a job because of caring responsibilities for their own child.

**“I have other caring responsibilities and duties that have impacted my ability to access education, employment and training.” (19, Birmingham)**

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

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### **Kerri Leung-Sykes, London**

24 year old Kerri has applied for over 200 jobs and been interviewed many times, but she hasn’t been able to get herself another job since being made redundant by a mobile phone store in November 2013. She gave up her degree after a year.

**“If I get some more experience and learn some new competencies and skills in the business administration field then that would really help me in the job market. But I was hoping to secure an apprenticeship so I could kind of work myself towards that but unfortunately I haven’t got one yet.”**

Kerri has been interviewed for several positions and even got to the final stages of the selection process for a business administration apprenticeship with a high profile employer.

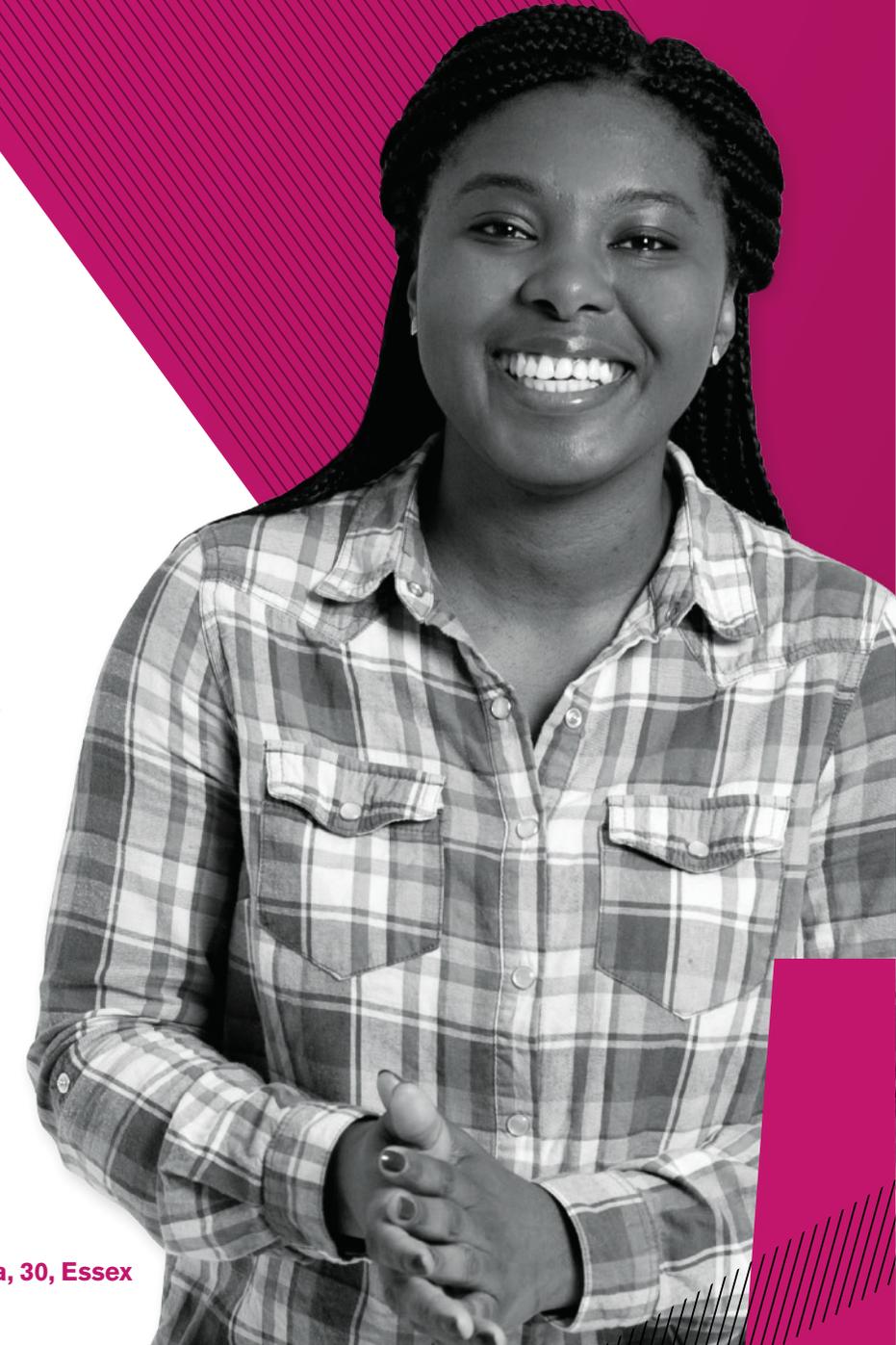
**“It’s a Catch 22; on the one hand they want to train you, but on the other hand some say you need more experience. It can be a bit tricky”**

In addition, Kerri has to care for her 14 year old sister since her mum passed away four years ago, yet this, she says, will not stop her from getting the job she wants.

**“It’s given me more of a drive to succeed. I don’t want my sister thinking I haven’t achieved anything”**

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**Iretiola, 30, Essex**



# NO-ONE IS GIVING HER A CHANCE

**She is in a downward spiral of practical and emotional challenges, diminishing self-confidence, and feelings of frustration and uselessness.**

58% have been prevented from applying for a job due to a lack of confidence.

“Vulnerable, dependent, depressed.” (24, London)

“Some days I really want to be the straight A student again and I want to get a good job and make a real difference, but other days I just want to give up because it doesn't seem very likely when I'm struggling as no-one really wants to deal with someone with mental health issues.” (18, Luton)

**She feels judged and denigrated.**

30% have been prevented from applying for a job because they felt judged by the way they look.

“Lazy, that's what society thinks of us.” (22, London)

“I feel that young people are judged automatically due to their age. The area I live in has quite a bad reputation and I feel that employers judge me by that before they look at my qualifications and experience.” (19, Newcastle)

Sushmita, 23, Southeast London

**She is concerned about the future and wants another chance to engage.**

43% say in three years' time they would rather be working in a paid job, than earning a fortune (28%) or being famous (5%).

“I'm in retail at the moment but obviously I don't want to do that forever, it's okay for now. But the thing is, I don't know what I want to do, I don't know if anyone else is like that? I'm not sure.” (19, London)

“I can only get jobs in retail or waitressing or what I have experience in. I would love to join the RAF but cannot afford to go to college and get the education and qualifications needed to join.” (24, Blackpool)



**“AS THE PERIOD OF UNEMPLOYMENT CONTINUES, I CANNOT SEE ANY WAY OF BREAKING OUT OF THE CYCLE AND THE MORE DESPERATE I FEEL.” (23, LONDON)**

## Catherine Cox, Blackpool

Having applied for over 300 jobs during seven months' unemployment, 23 year old Catherine enrolled in an eight-week voluntary work experience placement at a youth centre which she really enjoyed. However, she had to leave this as her advisers at Jobcentre Plus told her it was getting in the way of her job search.

Given her interest in youth work, Catherine decided she wanted to get a Level 3 qualification in youth work, but as this would involve being in full-time education, she would lose her Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and her Housing Benefit.

**“I couldn't have one without dropping the other. If I dropped JSA and housing benefit then I couldn't live... it was either a roof over my head and live or educate myself.”**

Catherine has had to give up her aspiration to become a youth worker. She finally managed to secure a permanent job as a hotel receptionist, thanks to a mum she met at the youth centre, but in low season she will not work enough hours to be able to afford her rent so she has had to move back in with her parents.

# NOTHING IS WORKING TO GET HER WORKING

**The careers support and advice she receives is often inadequate and given too early.**

**48%** feel they received careers advice from agencies like Jobcentre Plus that was not useful to them.

Giving careers advice only at **16-17** is not enough.

**41%** of young women say that careers advice would be most useful between the ages of **18-21**.

**The careers advice and guidance she receives is often based on her gender, reducing even more the limited opportunities available to her.**

Female NEETs are **three times** more likely than male NEETs to have been told to think about becoming care workers, nannies, nurses or hairdressers. Meanwhile men are **six times** more likely to be told to think about becoming IT technicians, construction workers or electricians and plumbers.

**"I came from a working-class area where it is difficult for girls to get anything but waitressing jobs. Boys get better jobs quicker - can get jobs in building."** (20, Birmingham)

**The training and work experience she receives, or is required to undertake, does not lead to a job.**

**63%** have either been prevented from applying for or accepting a job because they did not have the right qualifications.

**65%** of all NEETs with children feel that the training provided by the Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme only led to more training and not to employment.

**"I've got four years training in a college but then I had no job. It's better to have experience than qualifications."** (21, Blackburn)

**"Work experience is rubbish because the pay is crap and you get treated like rubbish."** (22, London)

**"A lot of places ask you to do work experience with the promise of a job at the end of it, but you don't get one."** (19, Manchester)

**"CAREERS ADVICE AT SCHOOL WAS UNHELPFUL - HAD TO FIND OUT ON MY OWN. I'M UNSURE AS TO WHAT TO DO AS A CAREER AND WILL HAVE TO MAKE THAT DECISION ALONE."** (18, Newcastle)

**Services are punitive and demeaning and are more focused on meeting targets than providing holistic support.**

All NEETs with children (**40%**) are more likely than those without (**27%**) to say the level of respect they receive from staff at the Jobcentre Plus is bad.

**"On a good day they're like, 'there's this thing', you're forced into it even if you don't want to do it and it's nothing to do with what you want to do. And I can't even do the job and they're still putting me forward for it."** (19, London)

**"I was sanctioned when I couldn't make it to an interview [in another city]. I told my advisor I couldn't attend because I didn't have the money to pay to get there, but I was sanctioned anyway. They are supposed to be on your side, but they are not."** (20, Blackburn)

**There are limited opportunities for second chances for her to get back into education or pursue a new career path. This results in jobs with no prospects.**

**55%** have not received any training or education since leaving school or university.

**"You should have the time to go on courses and then, when you feel like you've found the right thing, go into it. Because if you have a child, you do need to find something that can pay all your bills, not just a quick fix."** (24, London)

**"They don't help, all they care about is 'are you signing on?' Okay, what jobs are you applying to? Sign, get out."** (19, London)

**"Once you turn 21 you are not eligible for apprenticeships anymore, which was another kick in the butt."** (23, Blackpool)

# IT'S REALLY TOUGH GETTING WORK **AND THEN IT DOESN'T PAY**



Leah, 19, Hertfordshire

## **She applies for high numbers of jobs but doesn't get a response.**

Overall **61%** say it's hard for them to find a job due to the level of unemployment in their area.

Three quarters of female and male NEETs (**73%**) say that they have applied for many jobs and not heard anything back from their applications.

**"I've had no feedback from employers... it makes me feel useless."** (21, Barking)

**"I've been rejected from so many jobs I feel worthless – I don't even get replies."** (22, Birmingham)

## **Jobs that are on offer to her are often insecure, pay badly and have no prospects of improvement.**

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

**"I can only get short-term jobs."** (23, Blackpool)

## **Her hours of work are unpredictable or excessively rigid, meaning she cannot budget, plan for caring responsibilities or work flexibly.**

**23%** have been offered a job that did not guarantee a minimum number of hours, yet stopped them from working anywhere else (i.e. a zero hours contract).

**50%** say that having a job that allows them to combine working with caring for children is important to them, compared to only a third of males (**33%**) who say the same.

**"My contract is like minimum eight hours or something, so it's really bad but on average I get about 18 hours a week. But it's always changing so it's unstable. I never know how much I'm going to have coming so it's hard to budget and stuff."** (23, London)

## **She is expected to work for below the National Minimum Wage.**

**One in five** have been offered a job that paid less than the minimum wage.

**"Found it hard to get an above minimum wage job."** (20, Manchester)

**"I can only get low-paid jobs – I get more money on benefits than from the low-paid jobs available."** (19, Birmingham)

**"ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS – IT'S LIKE 'PAY AS YOU GO', LITERALLY!"**  
(25, LONDON)

# SHE FACES BIG CHALLENGES

**Her family is unable to support or advise her, which contributes to her difficulty in finding work or training.**

**33%** say that family support would be most helpful in achieving their ambitions.

**18%** say they were prevented from applying for a job because their family wanted them to do something different.

**“You end up doing it all and if you have no support from your family, you end up going down that road and you’re lost.”** (24, London)

**She is unable to move away from home for low-paid work with no prospects and is dependent on the local labour market.**

**54%** say they were prevented from either applying for or accepting a job because it was outside their local area.

**86%** say having a job that is close to home was important.

**“I’m facing problems finding local jobs.”** (20, Blackpool)

**“It was very difficult to find employment in my home town in Staffordshire. Luckily, I was able to move in with my boyfriend in Cambridgeshire, where there are many more opportunities.”** (24, Cambridge)

**Hayley, 24 & Frankie, 8, Southeast London**



# IT'S EVEN HARDER FOR MOTHERS

**Her role as a mother and carer in her family seriously inhibits the possibility of engaging in work.**

**69%** of all mothers NEET say that they have been put off from applying for a job due to caring responsibilities for their children.

**94%** of all mothers NEET say that having a job which allows them to combine working with caring for her children is important.

**“I had other caring duties so I didn’t get my GCSEs. This has held me back.”** (18, Birmingham)

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

**“WHERE I GREW UP, UNLESS YOU HAD A SUPPORTIVE FAMILY BACKGROUND THEN THE ODDS WERE STACKED AGAINST YOU AND SCHOOL DID VERY LITTLE TO HELP.”** (22, LONDON)

# BEING NEET LEAVES SCARS ON HER

Women who have been NEET are at risk of ending up in jobs with no career prospects and reduced earnings.

## FUTURE AVERAGE EARNINGS AT AGE 30-34.<sup>9</sup>

If been NEET aged 18-24

£21,000 Men

£10,000 Women

If not been NEET aged 18-24

£24,000 Men

£12,000 Women

Overall difference: By the time she reaches 34 a woman who has been NEET will be £14,000 a year worse off than a man who has never been NEET.

Gaps in her CV mean employers are less interested in her.

14% of employers would **not** consider recruiting school leavers whilst 11% would **not** consider recruiting the long-term unemployed.<sup>10</sup>

"If you've been out of work for a period of time they want to know what you've been doing, despite you being a parent. It goes against you that you haven't had any experience in the last year." (34, London)

She becomes increasingly despondent and finds it very difficult to remain motivated to find work.

40% of jobless young people have symptoms of mental illness.<sup>11</sup>

"I felt depressed, no money... where are you going to get it from? Unable to provide." (38, London)

"I was trying to find myself and then I had my child, then his dad passed away and every time I got back up, something knocked me back down again." (35, London)

She remains dependent and on benefits.

All NEETs aged 18-24 are more likely to be NEET again aged 26-30.<sup>12</sup>

"Yeah, like I've been on social for so long there's no movement, you just feel like you're stuck, stagnant." (38, London)

"I MIGHT QUALIFY FOR A JOB, BUT THERE IS AN AGE CRITERIA AND IT'S LIKE, WHY AM I TOO OLD? I DON'T FEEL OLD, I CAN DO THIS." (40, LONDON)

Sophie, 19, London



# SHE WOULD LIKE...

## Fewer assumptions and less discrimination in the workplace.

“Your gender should be anonymous when applying for jobs, so you’re judged on your skills and compatibility for the job and not your gender.” (19, Newcastle)

“The biggest focus should be about young women getting the same opportunities as young men.” (21, Birmingham)

## Accessible jobs that pay enough.

“When I was 20 I asked for a ‘better off’ calculation in order to consider my options and I was told that I would be £30 a week worse off by taking up work as a nursery nurse due to the level of National Minimum Wage.” (21, Birmingham)

## Tailored, non-gendered, careers advice and ongoing support by services like Jobcentre.

“Don’t stereotype career advice.” (24, Newcastle)

“Personalised career guidance through agencies such as the Jobcentre and the work programme.” (24, London)

“I feel like I need more practical support rather than leaflets and using the internet. I’m not aware of any outside agency apart from the Jobcentre. More workshops in the area are needed to help support young women.” (20, Manchester)

## Work that truly accommodates caring responsibilities.

“The kinds of jobs I could get need me to work evening and weekends. I can’t find childcare to cover those jobs.” (18, Birmingham)

## Feeling someone cares and can offer emotional support as well as practical advice, such as an individual project worker, friend or family member.

“Connexions was really good, but they only help you until you’re 18.” (19, Birmingham)

“The best careers advice is from home life, my parents advised me what to do... school and college not so much. I suppose it is my home influences that were most important.” (20, London)

## More opportunities for young women and to be given a chance.

“We are never going to get a job over someone who has been doing the job for ten years if no one gives us a chance.” (24, Southampton)

“Employers have to give females an opportunity or chance.” (20, Manchester)

“THE BIGGEST FOCUS SHOULD BE ABOUT YOUNG WOMEN GETTING THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES AS YOUNG MEN.” (21, BIRMINGHAM)

## Lauren Archbold, Barking & Dagenham

18 year old Lauren found careers advice at school unhelpful and often unavailable but she was interested in hair and beauty so she completed a seven-month qualification. However, far from helping her secure a job, Lauren spent the next two years unemployed.

During this time, she attended almost 20 interviews, yet failed to find a job or even be given any feedback, other than once being told that she didn’t qualify because she was too young and a woman.

“I have had severe depression, no faith in myself whatsoever.”

Lauren has felt unsupported whilst looking for work.

“The biggest barrier was finding support. I was very scared in interviews of what I should do or how I should act.”

Lauren is now completing a Business Administration apprenticeship, yet still doesn’t know what she wants to do or how she can find out about what she could do with this qualification.

Noor, 23, Southeast London



<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, May - July 2014: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/346029/NEET\\_Supplementary\\_tables\\_18\\_24\\_v0.1.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/346029/NEET_Supplementary_tables_18_24_v0.1.xls)

<sup>2</sup> ACEVO, 2012: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/other/youthunemployment.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> ACEVO, 2012: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/other/youthunemployment.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, April 2014: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/328934/JUNE14\\_SFR\\_YEAR1314\\_Q3\\_SUPP\\_Apprenticeship\\_Starts\\_by\\_Framework\\_\\_Level\\_and\\_Age\\_Final.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/328934/JUNE14_SFR_YEAR1314_Q3_SUPP_Apprenticeship_Starts_by_Framework__Level_and_Age_Final.xls)

<sup>5</sup> Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2012: Hidden Talents: [http://www.cesi.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/CESI\\_Hidden\\_Talents\\_Skills\\_Mismatch.pdf](http://www.cesi.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/CESI_Hidden_Talents_Skills_Mismatch.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> ACEVO, 2012: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/other/youthunemployment.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> ONS, August 2014: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/august-2014/table-a05.xls>

<sup>8</sup> Resolution Foundation, 2013, 'Minimum Stay': <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/minimum-stay/>

<sup>9</sup> ACEVO, 2012: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/other/youthunemployment.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> CIPD, 2013: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/survey-reports/labour-market-outlook-spring-2013.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> Prince's Trust, Youth Index 2014: [http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/PDF/YOUTH\\_INDEX\\_2014.pdf](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/PDF/YOUTH_INDEX_2014.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> ACEVO, 2012: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmpo/publications/other/youthunemployment.pdf>

## NEXT STEPS

The 'Scarred for Life?' Inquiry will continue to gather evidence about young women NEETs, with a view to making detailed recommendations in 2015 to both government and key stakeholders on what steps are needed to address the crisis of young women's worklessness. During this process Young Women's Trust will be hearing from more young women, as well as employers, training providers, Jobcentres, and advice and guidance organisations.

Join the conversation and be part of the change young women need at:

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

Lavonne, 24, North London



# EXPERT ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS

Chair – **Sian Williams**  
Broadcaster and Journalist

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**Christian Guy**  
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**Dr Lynne Friedli**  
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**YOUNG  
WOMEN'S  
TRUST**

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