

A pathway interrupted:
dyslexia and the barriers to education,
training and employment for young people.

September 2026



Executive summary

Dyslexia affects about 1 in 10 people in England. Despite its prevalence, many are never formally diagnosed and have to navigate education, training and employment without the recognition and understanding of the challenges they experience, and the support they need.



Drawing on the experiences of dyslexic young people aged 16 to 24, this report explores how education, training and workplace experiences, together with the support available for dyslexia, shape participation and progression. It considers whether the barriers encountered throughout these journeys contribute to young people becoming Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and sets out the changes needed to improve outcomes and reduce this risk.

Key findings

Dyslexia is often recognised during the school years, but formal diagnosis is frequently delayed or does not happen at all. While 68% of respondents had a formal diagnosis of dyslexia, less than 1 in 3 (32%) were diagnosed during

primary school, meaning they will have missed out on key support.



Many young people reported poor educational experiences, including limited understanding of dyslexia among teachers, teaching and curriculum approaches that did not suit the way they learned, and assessment styles that disadvantaged them. These repeated experiences of difficulty, misunderstanding or lack of support contribute to disengagement from education, impact progression into employment and training and increase the likelihood of someone becoming NEET.

Lower attainment creates a barrier to accessing further education, training, and apprenticeship opportunities. Many leave school without the GCSE maths and English passes needed for entry onto post 16 courses or apprenticeships. Those who were classified as NEET were more likely to have no qualifications compared to other young people in the survey, significantly impacting the choice of pathways open to them to fulfil their interests and aspirations.

The impact of dyslexia goes beyond attainment, negatively affecting mental health, confidence and self-esteem and young people's belief in themselves and what they can achieve.



76%

said dyslexia had negatively affected their self-esteem and mental health

Despite a small sample size there was also an emerging picture that those classified as NEET were less confident, had lower self-esteem, fewer aspirations and goals than other young people surveyed.

Young dyslexic people face significant barriers when applying for work, from understanding job adverts and completing applications to interviews, disclosure and requesting reasonable adjustments. Those who were NEET reported even lower confidence in interviews and asking for adjustments, alongside a greater need for careers support and more accessible recruitment processes.



81%

said dyslexia makes it difficult to read and understand job adverts

87%

said dyslexia makes it difficult to complete application forms and write cover letters

The transition from education into employment emerged as a particular point of vulnerability, especially for those without families able to offer support. Schools were seen as more successful at preparing young people for further education than for entering and succeeding in work.

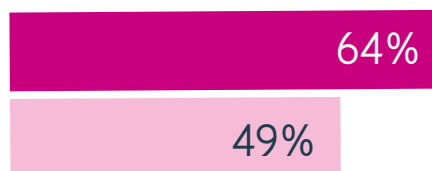
Only 1 in 3 young people felt well prepared for getting a job.



1 in 3

felt well prepared for getting a job

Financial circumstances can also shape a young person's experiences and expectations of education and employment with 64% of dyslexic young people from households earning £100,000 or more said they had been prepared well for further education, compared with 49% of those earning less than £30,000. Concerns about securing work also varied by household income.



 Earning > £100,000  Earning < £30,000

Recommendations

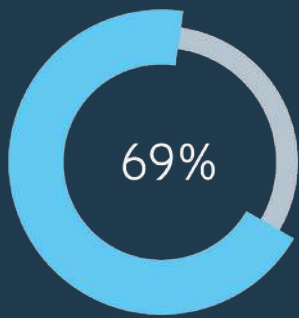
Our findings suggest that employment outcomes cannot be separated from what happens earlier in education. We recommend:

- Introduce early screening and a national pathway for diagnosis
- Introduce a pathway for identification and fast track to intervention for those identified later in school or post 16 education settings.
- Strengthen support in schools and post 16 settings through teacher training.
- Introduce a broader curriculum and qualification pathway at Key Stage 4 that values vocational and technical skills.
- Introduce alternative assessment methods for GCSE and A Levels.
- Ensure specialist careers advisors understand the specific challenges associated with dyslexia and can signpost to education and training with assessment formats that enable a young person to demonstrate their ability.
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to develop an accessible job application process with clear and inclusive adverts, accessible application platforms with screen readers and the ability for applicants to request alternative formats and reasonable adjustments throughout the process.
- Integrate employer guidance and information on dyslexia friendly recruitment processes into the DWP disability confident programme.
- Integrate the needs of dyslexic employees into the healthy working lifestyle framework in the DWP Vanguard.
- Include data on dyslexic jobseekers and employees in the Workplace Health Intelligence Unit.

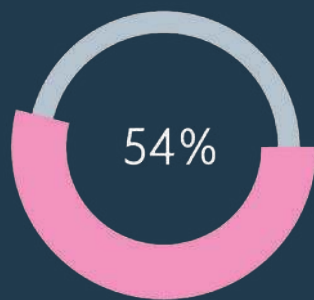
Conclusion

The challenges many dyslexic young people face in progressing into further education, training or work often begin much earlier in their education, with late or absent identification, poor educational experiences and inadequate support contributing to disengagement, lower attainment, reduced confidence and difficulties making the transition into work. Our research shows how experiences at different stages of a young person's journey can be connected, with difficulties in one area often affecting later outcomes.

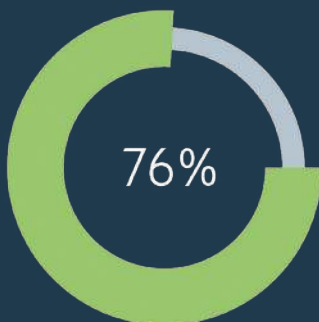
Key statistics at glance



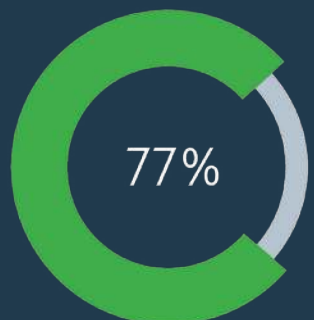
said their school experiences had limited the education, training and career opportunities available to them.



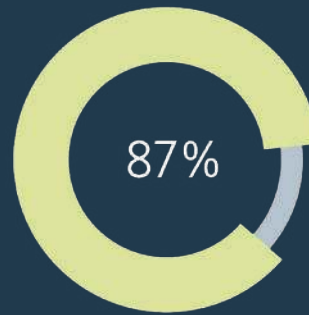
agreed that teachers did not understand dyslexia.



said dyslexia had negatively affected their self-esteem and mental health.



worried about disclosing dyslexia to an employer.



said the job application process puts dyslexic people at a disadvantage.

About this report

This report has been produced by the British Dyslexia Association, in partnership with M·E·L Research, to highlight the lived experience of dyslexic young people aged 16-24 in education, training and the workplace. It draws on the findings from a survey of 257 dyslexic young people in England, alongside in-depth interviews with dyslexic young people aged 18 to 24 who were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The report looks at how educational experiences and dyslexia support shape engagement with learning and progression through education, and whether these experiences contribute to dyslexic young people becoming Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).



Foreword

Ryman

Earlier this year, I became Vice President of the British Dyslexia Association, and it is a real honour to represent the 6.8 million people in the UK who, like me, are dyslexic.

This report shines a light on a group of young people who are too often overlooked. Too many dyslexic young people leave education and then lose their way, falling into the gap between school, further education, training and work. Once someone has fallen through that gap, it can be very difficult to find their way back.

The number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is rightly rising up the public agenda. But there is a glaring gap in what we know. We do not even know how many of these young people are dyslexic. Many will never have been identified. Others may have spent years being told, directly or indirectly, that they are not clever enough, not trying hard enough or simply not good at learning. The problem is often not a lack of ability. It is that they have been trying to succeed in systems that were not designed with the way they think and learn in mind. That needs to change.

If we are serious about tackling the NEET crisis, dyslexia cannot be left out of the conversation. Government, education, employers and charities all have a part to play. Young people need the right support before they leave education, clear routes into training and work, and employers who understand how to help people get started and thrive.

Retail has an important role to play. One in five adults in the UK say their first job was in retail. For many young people, that first job can be the start of something much bigger, providing skills, confidence and a route to progress, whether they stay in retail or move on to another career.

I am proud that Ryman is a dyslexia-inclusive employer. Supporting people to work to their strengths is not just the right thing to do, it makes good business sense.

Now we need to make sure that that first rung of the career ladder is there for everyone. That means creating good-quality entry-level jobs, removing unnecessary barriers and making sure dyslexic young people are given a fair chance to get into work and get on.

I hope this report starts a much bigger conversation about how we support young people into work. The right support can turn a first job into a first step towards a career, opening up opportunities and helping young people realise what they can achieve. We cannot support young people if we do not see them, and we cannot afford for dyslexic young people to remain invisible.

Theo Paphitis

Vice President, British Dyslexia Association
and Chairman, Ryman

Introduction

Dyslexia affects about 1 in 10 people in England. Despite its prevalence, many are never formally diagnosed and have to navigate education, training and employment without the recognition and understanding of the challenges they experience, and the support they need.



600,000
dyslexic young people

Dyslexia primarily affects reading and writing skills, and sometimes the ability to process and remember information. These challenges can affect learning and the acquisition of literacy – fundamental skills required to access education, work and life.

Whilst there are positives to thinking differently, for young people who do not receive timely identification and support, the consequences can be long-lasting. Lower attainment, disengagement from learning, poor self-esteem, low self-confidence and anxiety are all common outcomes. As a result, young people with dyslexia are disproportionately at risk of becoming not in education, employment and training (NEET).

Over 1 million young people aged 16-24 were classified as NEET in the first quarter of 2026. One in eight young people, the highest rate since 2013¹.



1 in 8 young people are
classified as NEET

An independent review chaired by Alan Milburn described a “lost generation” and warned that without urgent action and systematic reform, the numbers could increase to 1.25 million young people within the next 5 years. His interim report published in May 2026 identifies deep-rooted structural issues in education, skills development and labour market access, with disadvantaged young people disproportionately affected.

While there is no national data on the proportion of dyslexic young people who are NEET, a report from the National Centre for Social Research identified that educational attainment, socio-economic disadvantage and special educational needs (SEN) are all risk factors associated with becoming NEET.

We know that children on SEN support are six times more likely to be excluded than those with no identified SEN.

6X more likely to be
excluded from school

Based on this, dyslexic young people are at higher risk of becoming NEET.

¹ ONS data May 2026



Late diagnosis or no diagnosis at all

Our findings indicate that dyslexia is identified through a range of routes, with formal assessment and diagnosis the most common, but with school support, workplace or Occupational Health assessment and self-identification also playing an important role.

1 in 3 (32%) were diagnosed early in primary school, but over half (57%) did not receive a formal diagnosis until secondary school or later. The picture is striking among the respondents without a formal diagnosis, three in four had been told that they were dyslexic by the end of secondary school, but that identification was not consistently followed by formal diagnosis. This is important because the timing and route of identification can influence whether young people understand their difficulties, receive appropriate support and are able to develop strategies that help them in education, employment and adult life.

Undiagnosed dyslexia can impact on educational attainment and young people's ability to achieve their potential. Young people classified as NEET had all had their dyslexia identified late or missed entirely. They link early diagnosis and better support to improved attainments, greater confidence and self-acceptance, and different outcomes.

"I think [diagnosis] would have helped a lot with my self-esteem, especially growing up. Being told that you're slow or you might just be stupid from people who are meant to be educating you growing up is, well it was pretty hard as a kid"

Max

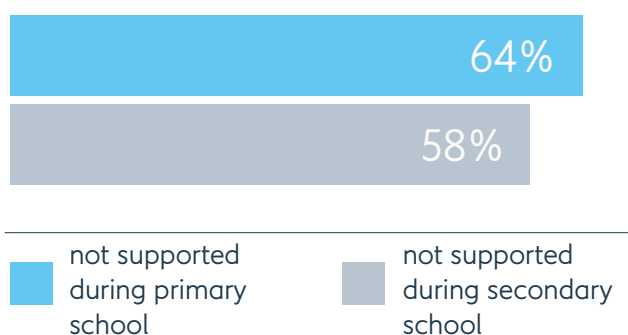
"I would feel so much more confident in myself. Because I would have known, I would have had that support. And I feel like I would feel much better in myself. And I would also have had a completely different education...I would probably be ahead."

Grace

Poor educational experiences and disengagement

Our findings suggest that, for many respondents, school was not experienced as an environment that adequately understood or supported dyslexia.

At primary school, 64% of respondents agreed that their dyslexia was not well supported. The experience was broadly similar at secondary school at 58%.



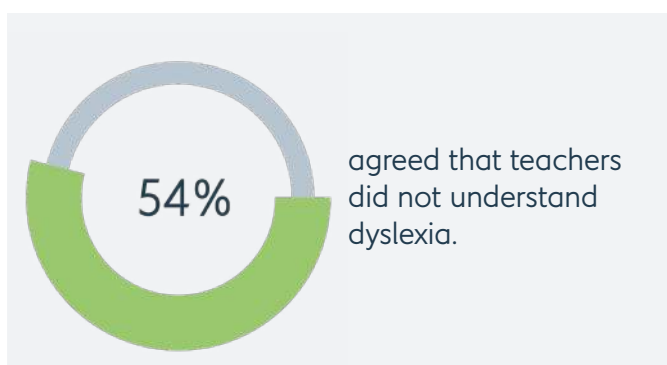
This indicates that for a substantial proportion of respondents, difficulties with support continued throughout school.

“Support [needed] earlier in primary school. I would struggle with keeping up with the reading. Everyone was jumping reading levels ahead. If I would just have been given some kind of support, that would have been useful.” Ruby



“What would have made the biggest difference at school? If I’d had help from Year 9. One person to help me.” Jordan

The findings also highlight concerns about teachers' understanding of dyslexia. More than half of respondents, 54%, agreed that teachers did not understand dyslexia, including 12% who strongly agreed. This rises to 61% among respondents who reported that their dyslexia had reduced their confidence.



“I think understanding that this is a learning processing problem rather than a you problem. I feel like in school, they don’t explicitly say it’s a you problem, but the way they treat you [suggests they think] it’s a you problem.”

Isy

There is a broader issue with how the education system is structured around learning, teaching and assessment. Four in five respondents felt that the curriculum did not suit the way dyslexic pupils learn, and a similar proportion felt that assessments disadvantaged dyslexic pupils.

“It is torturous because school is so academic. And if you’re not smart in a traditional sense, you’re done.” Mia

“I would do really well in my other work because it had nothing to do with writing or reading, and it was just so much easier.” Logan

This poor educational experience, lack of support and understanding and difficulties in accessing the curriculum and assessments impacts on engagement in education.

“I was put in bottom set English in Year 10 because I was dyslexic for my GCSEs, and I was just with a bunch of people that didn’t care. So then I started to not care.”

Jordan

A close-up portrait of a young woman with light brown skin and dark hair pulled back into a bun. She has a nose ring and is wearing a thick, light-colored, fuzzy jacket. The background is a brick wall with a metal fence and some greenery.

“I would say
about 80% of my
secondary school...
I would just give up
on a lot of my work
because it was just,
I just struggled too
much.”

Ella



Lower attainment and barriers to progression

GCSE results for pupils with dyslexia have improved over time but have failed to catch up with their peers. More than a decade of national data demonstrates that the education system continues to leave thousands of dyslexic learners at a significant disadvantage and unable to achieve the grades they deserve because the exam system disadvantages dyslexic learners.

In 2024/25 only two in ten pupils with dyslexia achieved a grade 5 or above in GCSE English and maths, compared with five in ten of pupils with no identified SEN – an attainment gap of 30 percentage points.

Young people in our research cited academic requirements as a significant barrier to accessing education, training and apprenticeships opportunities, with 67% of young people who are NEET and almost a third of all young people (29%) saying they did not have the qualifications needed to apply, such as GCSE English or maths.

“I’m trying to get into uni too, but it’s impossible as I have no GCSEs.” Ella

The findings on school assessment are also important. 83% agreed that school assessments, including exams, tests and coursework, disadvantaged dyslexic pupils, and created a barrier to them gaining the qualifications needed for progression into further education, training and apprenticeships.

“I kind of just struggled through. I was always very bad at exams and essays, and I never really did very well, but I kind of scraped through enough that it was just...no one ever really thought about it.”
lyaz

The findings suggest that barriers to attainment are not simply about academic ability. 80% reported that the curriculum did not suit the way dyslexic pupils learn and that assessments disadvantaged them.

“My options are more limited because of dyslexia, 100%.”
Max

Poor mental health, low self-confidence, poor self-esteem and anxiety

The impact of dyslexia is not confined to educational attainment or practical difficulties with reading and writing. For many respondents, their experiences of dyslexia and education have affected confidence, self-esteem, mental health and their expectations for the future. This lack of self-belief can limit young people as they move into adulthood.

“I’ve failed for so many years, I think what’s the point? I’m just going to fail again.” Noah

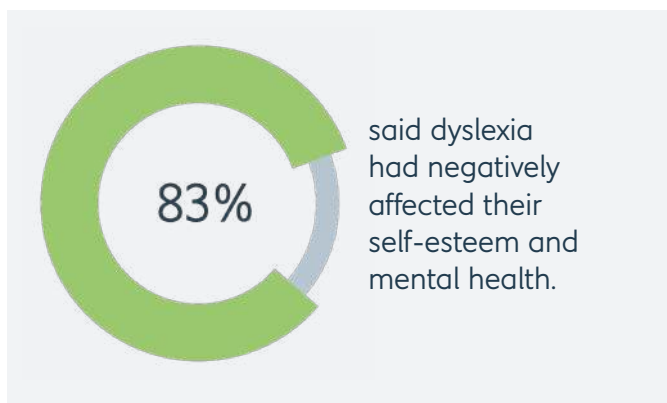
The findings point to a strong relationship between negative experiences in school and later perceptions of confidence, aspirations and opportunity, and the data suggests that the way dyslexia is identified and supported during education may have lasting consequences.

85% of those who said dyslexia was not well supported at primary school agreed that it had reduced their confidence, compared with 71% among those who said it was well supported. The equivalent figures for secondary school were 83% and 71%.

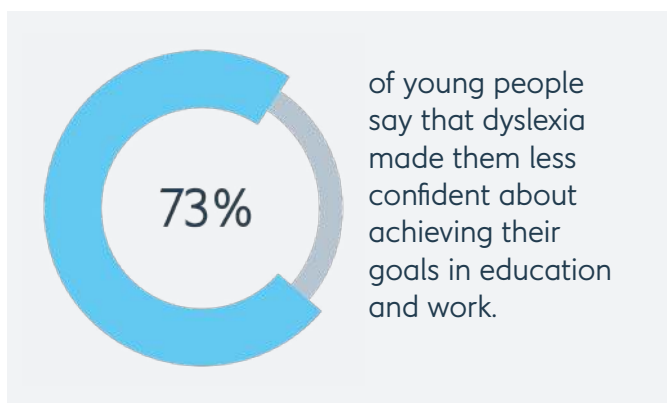
These differences are important because they suggest that confidence is not simply an individual characteristic. Experiences of support, or lack of support, appear to be closely associated with how young people feel about themselves and their future.

“I was always just told I was slow. And when you’re getting told you’re slow, you go, I’m stupid... especially as a kid, you’ve got your GCSEs, you’ve got your SATs, you’ve got all this stuff where everything in your life has been basically levelled and you’re being told if you’re smart or not.” Ruby

The findings on self-esteem and mental health are similarly concerning. Three quarters of respondents (76%) agreed that dyslexia had negatively affected their self-esteem and mental health. And 83% of those who said their school experience had limited their education, training and career opportunities also said that dyslexia had negatively affected their self-esteem and mental health.



There was a similar pattern for school support which suggests that negative educational experiences and inadequate support are closely linked to poorer perceptions of confidence and wellbeing. Poor school experience and lack of support also lowers aspirations and perceptions of future prospects.



Among respondents who were not currently in employment and could reasonably be expected to need to look for work at some point, 70% agreed that they worried they would not be able to get a job.





Barriers to accessing education, training and apprenticeships and work

Work

The route into employment is made harder by recruitment processes that rely heavily on reading, writing and conventional communication skills. Eight in ten respondents (81%) said dyslexia makes it difficult to read and understand job adverts, while 87% said it makes it difficult to complete application forms and write cover letters. More than three quarters (77%) felt that job applications rely too heavily on reading and writing skills.

“I do job applications and I find it is insanely hard for me to do.”

Grace

These difficulties translate into a strong sense of disadvantage. Almost nine in ten respondents (87%) said the job application process puts dyslexic people at a disadvantage compared with other people.

More than half (59%) also said dyslexia makes it difficult to perform well in job interviews, where processing difficulties and poor working memory associated with dyslexia can reduce ability to hold the question in mind while structuring a response, or to recall information at speed under pressure.

“Applying for jobs relies too much on reading and writing. Even jobs you don’t think need this, they still need these things.” Ella

The barriers are not only about the mechanics of applying. There is considerable uncertainty about whether to disclose dyslexia and ask for support. More than three quarters (77%) worry that telling a prospective employer about their dyslexia could reduce their chances of being offered a job.



Four in five (81%) do not know whether they should select the disability box when applying for jobs,



There is also a clear perception that the support available is insufficient. Eight in ten respondents (82%) said there is not enough support available for dyslexic people when applying for jobs, and 88% said employers should do more to make the job application process accessible.

“I think oh, I could do this...I’d be great in this role. I could do this [but] I will never get through the whole stages. I would never be able to fill in all those applications and then have to go through all of the interviews and everything like that” Sam

The findings also suggest that some groups experience particular difficulties. Young people with multiple neurodivergent conditions were especially likely to report difficulties with application forms and cover letters, with 93% agreeing that dyslexia makes this difficult. They were also particularly likely to feel that the recruitment process puts dyslexic people at a disadvantage (93%).

“Their job application was so long...so much writing and they wanted so much research. I really wanted to do it. I started to do my research, but then I realised this is going to be too much writing for me. I can’t do it...there’s actually been two jobs recently that I’ve just haven’t applied for because of that... it’s a shame, isn’t it?”

Mia

“I definitely think I couldn’t just go into any job or position, because I would just struggle.” Sam



Education, training and apprenticeships

Young people with dyslexia reported a wide range of barriers when trying to access education, training and apprenticeships. The most commonly reported barrier was the application process itself, cited by 43% of respondents. This included application forms, personal statements and interviews. A further 40% said they had experienced a lack of information, advice, guidance or support about their options.

Academic requirements were also a significant barrier. 29% said they did not have the qualifications needed to apply, such as GCSE English or maths. This was particularly pronounced among 16 to 18-year-olds, where 45% reported this barrier, compared with 25% of those aged 19 to 24.

Support within education was another important issue. 32% reported a lack of study skills or learning support, while 30% said they had not received the adjustments or support they needed at school, such as learning support, extra time in exams or assistive technology. 28% found it difficult to find an education course that suited the way they learn.

One in three (31%) said they found it difficult to find a job that suited the way their brain works, while 32% worried that their dyslexia would affect their chances of being accepted.



32%

worried dyslexia affected their chances of being accepted

Confidence and wellbeing were also significant barriers. More than a third (35%) said that their confidence, self-belief or mental wellbeing had made it more difficult to access education, training or apprenticeships.



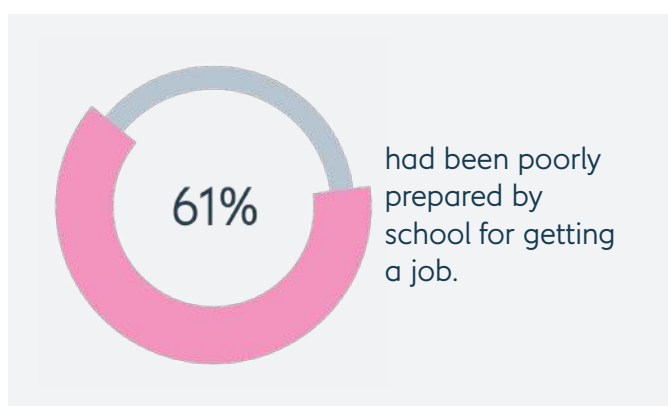
Lack of support systems in place, especially at transition stages

The findings show that young people felt schools prepared them better for further education than the transition into employment and independent adult life. But with the school focus on further education this has implications for those young people who do not choose this pathway and are looking for an apprenticeship or other training opportunities when leaving school.

More than half of respondents (53%) said their school had prepared them very or fairly well for further education or training. However, this relatively positive picture did not extend to the transition into employment. Only 1 in 3 felt their school had prepared them well for getting a job, while almost two thirds (61%) said they had been prepared poorly.

Our findings suggest that the transition from school to employment is a particular point of vulnerability for dyslexic young people. Too many appear to leave education without feeling adequately equipped to secure work, navigate the workplace, manage their dyslexia in employment or feel confident in their abilities. This points to the importance of strengthening preparation for employment and adult life alongside academic and further education pathways.

Young people who were NEET reported particularly poor preparation for employment. Among this group, only 6% said their school had prepared them well for succeeding in the workplace, while 67% said they had been prepared poorly. For getting a job, none of the NEET respondents reported being prepared well, compared with 83% who said they had been prepared poorly.



The findings also point to differences associated with household income. Young people from households earning £100,000 or more were more likely to say they had been prepared well for getting a job than those in lower-income households. A similar pattern can be seen in preparation for further education, where 64% of respondents in the highest income group said they had been prepared well, compared with 49% among those earning less than £30,000.

The experience of moving on from education becomes noticeably less positive as young people move towards employment. Among respondents who had progressed beyond school to college or sixth form, four in ten did not feel well supported, including 12% who felt they had received no support at all.



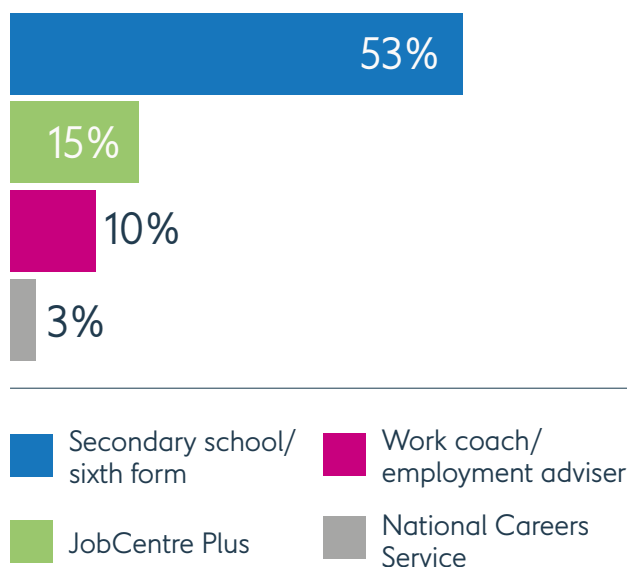
4 in 10 did not feel well supported

The transition from education into work, an apprenticeship or traineeship was less positive. Only 43% felt well supported, and 17% who felt not at all supported. Young people with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia were more likely to feel well supported during both transitions than those without a formal diagnosis.

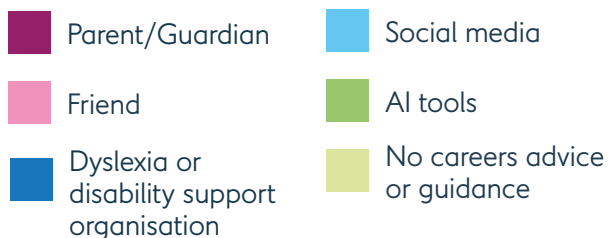
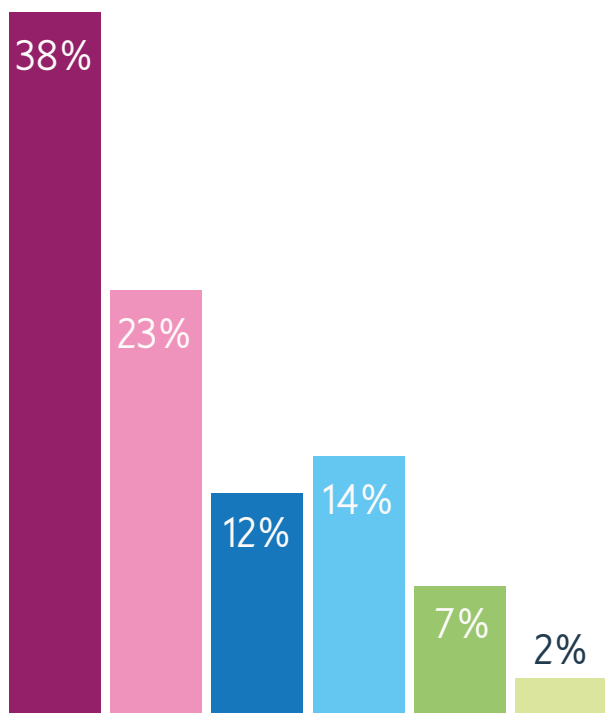
Among respondents who were NEET, 28% felt well supported moving into work, while 50% did not.

Careers advice and guidance

The survey asked where young people had received careers advice or guidance. The most common sources were secondary school, and college or sixth form, both cited by 53%. Around one in six (15%) had received advice from Jobcentre Plus, while 10% had received it from a work coach or employment adviser. Only 3% had used the National Careers Service.



There was also a notable reliance on informal sources. 38% had received careers advice from a parent or guardian and 23% from a friend, compared with just 12% from a dyslexia or disability support organisation. Social media was used by 14%, while 7% had used AI tools such as ChatGPT. Overall, only 2% said they had received no careers advice or guidance at all.



While secondary schools were a major source of careers guidance, four in ten respondents who received advice from secondary school did not consider it relevant to them.

Advice from Jobcentre Plus was considered relevant by 68%, although the sample was smaller for this.

Work coaches and employment advisers scored more positively, with 81% considering their advice relevant, while 90% of those who had received advice from a current or previous employer considered it relevant. Advice from apprenticeship or training providers was also highly rated, although this was a very small sample.

University careers advice stands out as particularly positively viewed. 91% of those who had received careers advice from a university considered it to be relevant.



What would young people with dyslexia like to see change

1 Better identification, diagnosis of dyslexia in schools

Better identification and diagnosis of dyslexia in schools was the most frequently selected priority, with 55% of respondents including it in their top three and selected by 51% as the single most important measure.

5 Better access to reasonable adjustments in education and the workplace

27% selected better access to reasonable adjustments in education and the workplace among their top three priorities. Respondents in work or apprenticeships were somewhat more likely to select this option (30%) than those in education (24%).

2 More support for pupils with dyslexia in schools

46% of respondents selected more support for pupils with dyslexia in schools among their top three priorities.

6 Employment specific options

13% selected a need for greater awareness and understanding of dyslexia among employers and 11% selected more accessible job application processes.

3 Flexible assessment

45% selected more flexible assessment methods, such as less reliance on written exams, among their top three priorities.

4 Teacher training

43% of respondents selected better training for teachers about dyslexia among their top three priorities, with 10% selecting it as their first choice.



The employment options are considerably lower than the four leading priorities. This is interesting given the findings elsewhere in the survey showing substantial concerns about the transition into employment and worries about the application process and getting a job.

One possible interpretation is that respondents see improving education as the foundation for improving later employment outcomes, with better identification, support, assessment and teacher training as more fundamental interventions than measures targeted specifically at the point of transition into work.





Recommendations

The findings suggest that employment outcomes cannot be separated from what happens earlier in education.

- » Introduce early screening and a national pathway for diagnosis.
- » Introduce a pathway for identification and fast track to intervention for those identified later in school or post 16 education settings.
- » Strengthen support in schools and post 16 settings through teacher training.
- » Introduce a broader curriculum and qualification pathway at Key Stage 4 that values vocational and technical skills.
- » Introduce alternative assessment methods for GCSE and A Levels.
- » Effective transition planning and support from school into post 16 training, education or work.
- » Ensure specialist careers advisors understand the specific challenges associated with dyslexia, and can signpost to education and training with assessment formats that enable a young person to demonstrate their ability.
- » Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to develop an accessible job application process with clear and inclusive adverts, accessible application platforms with screen readers and the ability for applicants to request alternative formats and reasonable adjustments throughout the process.
- » Integrate employer guidance and information on dyslexia friendly recruitment processes into the DWP disability confident programme.
- » Integrate the needs of dyslexic employees into the healthy working lifestyle framework in the DWP Vanguard.
- » Include data on dyslexic jobseekers and employees in the Workplace Health Intelligence Unit.

Conclusion



For many dyslexic young people, the transition to adulthood is harder than it needs to be or should be. Dyslexia does not determine a young person's educational or employment outcomes, and many dyslexic young people do brilliantly. But our research shows that too many face barriers throughout their education that can make it harder to achieve their potential, progress into further education, training or employment, and make successful transitions into adult life, and some do end up not being in education, employment or training (NEET).

The barriers often begin early. Dyslexia is frequently identified late or not at all, support in school is inconsistent with many feeling as if their teachers do not understand their challenges, and teaching and assessment do not enable dyslexic

learners to demonstrate what they know and can do. Over time, these experiences can contribute to lower attainment, reduced confidence and fewer qualifications or opportunities. For some young people, this can make the transition beyond school particularly difficult.

The experiences of young people who are currently NEET provide a particularly stark illustration of what can happen when these barriers accumulate. Every NEET respondent in our survey said their dyslexia had been identified late or missed entirely at school. Nine in ten said their school experience had limited their education, training and career opportunities. Just 6% felt school had prepared them well for succeeding in the workplace, while none felt well prepared for getting a job. More than half lacked the study skills or learning support they needed, and two thirds lacked the qualifications needed to apply for further education or training.

These findings do not mean that dyslexia causes young people to become NEET. Rather, they illustrate very clearly how missed identification, inadequate support and poor preparation can restrict opportunities and increase the difficulties some dyslexic young people face as they move into adulthood.

With around 600,000 dyslexic young people aged 16 to 24 in England, this matters on a significant scale. Every young person should have the opportunity to develop their skills, pursue their ambitions and find a route into education, training or employment that works for them. **We simply should not accept a system in which dyslexic young people have to overcome unnecessary barriers simply to get the same opportunities as their peers.** We should not accept it for them, and we should not accept it as a society.

The barriers are not inevitable. Earlier identification, effective support in education, appropriate assessment, better careers advice and stronger transitions into further education, training and employment can make a real difference. Support must also continue beyond school, recognising that young people may need different forms of help as they move into further education, training and work.

The message from our research is clear. We need to identify dyslexia earlier, remove the barriers that hold young people back and make sure they are properly supported to move into the next stage of their lives. **Dyslexia should never limit a young person's opportunities or potential.** We can do better, and we really must. We, and they, cannot afford us not to.



Methodology

Our research used a mixed-methods approach to explore the experiences of dyslexic young people in education, employment and training. It combined a quantitative survey of 257 young people aged 16 to 24 in England with in-depth qualitative interviews with dyslexic young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The quantitative survey provides a broad picture of young people's experiences, outcomes and circumstances across education, training and employment. The qualitative interviews provide a more detailed understanding of the experiences of young people who are NEET, including the factors that have shaped their pathways, the barriers they have encountered and the support they have received or needed.

It is important to recognise that the definition of NEET does not necessarily reflect how young people understand their own circumstances. Being classified as NEET describes a young person's current position in relation to education, employment and training, but does not explain why they are in that position or how they identify themselves.

In-depth interviews with young people who are NEET

Ten young people aged 18 to 24 who were not in education, employment or training were recruited for in-depth qualitative interviews. Participants were recruited using a screener produced by M·E·L Research and reviewed collaboratively with the British Dyslexia Association (BDA).

A discussion guide was developed to provide structure and a framework for the interviews. These were conducted by M·E·L Research either online via Microsoft Teams or by telephone, depending on the access preference of each young person.

The interviews aimed to:

- identify the barriers dyslexic young people face when seeking, accessing and sustaining education, training and employment
- understand the contribution of dyslexia to young people's experiences of becoming and remaining NEET
- develop recommendations for policymakers to improve outcomes for dyslexic young people.

In this research, NEET is used as a classification to describe young people who are not currently in education, employment or training. A young person may not identify themselves as NEET, even where their current circumstances meet

the definition. The interviews therefore explored participants' experiences in their own terms, rather than assuming that being NEET was solely or directly attributable to dyslexia.

Profile of the NEET interview sample

Characteristic	Sample details
Gender	Female (8)
	Male (2)
Age	18 (2)
	19 (2)
	20 (1)
	22 (1)
	23 (3)
	24 (1)
Ethnicity	White British (6)
	Black African (1)
	White British and Black Caribbean (1)
	Other mixed ethnicity (2)
England region	East of England (2)
	Greater London (2)
	North West (1)
	South East (1)
	South West (1)
	West Midlands (3)
Neurodivergent condition	Dyslexia only (2)
	Dyslexia and ADHD (5)
	Dyslexia and ASC (1)
	Dyslexia, ADHD and ASC (2)

Quantitative survey

The quantitative element comprised an online survey of young people aged 16 to 24 living in England who identified as dyslexic. The survey included 257 respondents.

Participants included young people who:

- had a formal diagnosis of dyslexia
- had completed a dyslexia screener
- identified as dyslexic based on dyslexic traits or previous educational support.

This inclusive approach reflects the fact that many young people with dyslexia do not have a formal diagnosis. Requiring a formal diagnosis as a condition of participation could therefore have excluded a significant group of young people whose experiences are relevant to this research, particularly where the cost or accessibility of assessment has been a barrier.

Survey participants were recruited through specialist online research panels and the fieldwork was managed by M·E·L Research.

Profile of survey respondents

Characteristic	Sample details (257)
Gender	Female (66%)
	Male (33%)
Age	Prefer not to say (1%)
	16 - 18 years (16%)
	19 - 24 years (84%)
Ethnicity	Prefer not to say (1%)
	Summary: Asian (5%)
	Summary: Black (8%)
	Summary: Mixed (8%)
	Summary: White (77%)
	Summary: Other (1%)
England region	North East (7%)
	North West (16%)
	Yorkshire and the Humber (8%)
	East Midlands (8%)
	West Midlands (10%)
	East of England (8%)
	London (21%)
	South East (13%)
	South West (9%)
Highest educational attainment	No qualifications (6%)
	Level 1/entry level (14%)
	Level 2 (22%)
	Apprenticeship (3%)
	Level 3 (37%)
	Level 4 and above (18%)
The Index of Multiple Deprivation*	
Most deprived third of areas	32%
Living in the least deprived third	16%
Lived in areas in the middle deprivation group	28%
Classification unknown	24%
Representation of different stages of the transition from education to employment	
41% were in work, including 27% in full-time and 14% part-time. 6% were self-employed or undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship. 39% were in education, including 25% at university and 14% at college.	

*The Index of Multiple Deprivation provides an indication of respondents' socio-economic circumstances.

Case study

Ryman – building an inclusive workplace

Ryman is committed to creating an inclusive workplace where colleagues with dyslexia and other learning differences can thrive.

“For us, being dyslexia-inclusive is about making sure people have the support and understanding they need to do their best work. It’s not about creating a separate approach for people with dyslexia, but making our workplace work better for everyone. Our Dyslexia Champions, accessible resources and awareness work have helped make those conversations much more open and straightforward.”

Sharon, HR Director, Ryman

A key part of Ryman’s approach is making support part of everyday workplace practice, rather than something colleagues have to seek out when they are struggling.

Ryman has established an internal network of Dyslexia Champions. Champions provide peer support, help colleagues identify strategies that work for them, and share practical advice about different learning and working styles. They also help project teams consider accessibility when developing new initiatives.

A dedicated accessibility hub on the HR portal brings together practical resources, including guidance documents, instructional videos, communication channels and tips for managing everyday tasks. This makes support easier to find and reduces the need for colleagues to navigate the organisation to get help.

Ryman has also reviewed its internal communication and visual design standards, introducing more accessible fonts and high-contrast colour palettes across corporate materials.

Alongside these practical changes, Ryman focuses on raising awareness. Dyslexia awareness sessions are delivered during Dyslexia Awareness Month, while business-wide conference presentations give colleagues and managers practical guidance on neurodiversity and workplace adjustments.

Supporting young people into employment

Ryman’s commitment to inclusion extends to young people entering the workplace. The organisation offers T-Level placements, work experience and apprenticeships, providing structured opportunities for young people to

develop skills and experience the workplace. Ryman also works directly with local further education colleges, delivering talks about workplace inclusion and encouraging students to apply for placements.

Importantly, new colleagues, interns and apprentices are told from the outset that adjustments and support are available, including for future learning and progression opportunities. This helps create a culture where asking for support is a normal part of learning and working.

What could other organisations learn from Ryman?

Ryman has found that building long-term relationships with local schools, colleges and youth organisations can be particularly effective. Structured opportunities to experience the workplace can build confidence, develop practical skills and help young people understand different career pathways.

This approach could be replicated by other employers by:

- Developing relationships with local education providers.
- Creating structured routes into work through placements, work experience and apprenticeships.
- Making adjustments and support clear from the beginning.
- Giving managers practical guidance on supporting neurodivergent colleagues.
- Making workplace information and communications more accessible.
- Creating internal champions who can build awareness and provide peer support.

Ryman's experience shows that creating a dyslexia-inclusive workplace is not simply about individual adjustments. It is about building accessibility, awareness and support into everyday practice, while creating clear and supported pathways into employment.

Case study

London Borough of Camden



"The London Borough of Camden has four Missions which are the long-term goals for the future of the borough, developed in collaboration with people across Camden. The Youth Mission aims for every young person to have access to economic opportunity that enables them to be safe and secure. At the heart of this mission is making Camden a place where young people can easily find good jobs and training opportunities, even if they may face additional challenges to this. "

Florence Henry, London Borough of Camden

A key part of Camden's Youth Mission is to coordinate and strengthen activities across the borough, bringing together education settings, employers, the third sector and the council, to push forward activity. It also recognises the importance of young people's voice in shaping the support that is meant for them. Disabled children and children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) are priority cohorts for the Youth Mission, meaning that there is a particular focus on support for young people with additional needs and barriers to progression, key factors which increase the risk of young people becoming NEET.

What could other councils learn from Camden?

Shared focus and partnership working has resulted in some significant achievements.

- Opportunities Centres provide young people with access to a wider range of education and work options.
- A Primary Careers Day has been established to help build aspirations amongst young children.
- The STEAM programme links employers and schools to build science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics opportunities.
- An AI campus with Google whose headquarters are based in the borough, provides young people with the skills they need for the job opportunities of the future.

Case study

Simian



“At SIMIAN, we identify dyslexia and additional learning needs as early as possible through a thorough initial assessment, learner discussions and support planning. We provide tailored support such as additional learning support, adapted teaching materials and practice, assistive technology, reading pens, extra reading time, coloured overlays, extra time for assessments, one-to-one coaching, and regular progress reviews. Our instructors receive training in SEND and inclusive teaching practices to ensure learning is accessible, while our careers guidance and employer engagement teams work closely with learners and employers to support progression to remain in education, apprenticeships and employment.”

Jan Pennington, Training Manager.

SIMIAN is a specialist construction training provider delivering Scaffolding and Roofing apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, NVQs, commercial training, and employability programmes that help people develop the skills, qualifications and confidence needed to secure sustainable careers in the construction industry.

Key challenges

- Engaging young people who have experienced previous barriers to education, including low confidence, poor prior educational experiences, additional learning needs, mental health concerns.

- More pre apprenticeship provision is required across many more construction trades to provide a pathway into mainstream apprenticeships.

What could be replicated by other organisations?

- A learner centred approach.
- Dyslexia awareness training for all staff.
- Weekly learner inclusion meetings with instructors and skills coaches to ensure we adapt deliver and support learner needs.
- Sharing best practice on support and interventions for all learners and ensuring “inclusion”.
- Early identification of needs, personalised support plans and regular learner reviews.
- Strong employer engagement and close collaboration between educations, support staff and employers.

The benefits

- Improved attendance, achievement and progression outcomes.
- Currently 75.8% achievement for learners with additional needs compared to 71% overall achievement.

Case study

Lexonic



Funded by the Department for Education (DfE), the three-year Lexonik Post-16 project was delivered in further education colleges to strengthen literacy support for young people aged 16–19, particularly those resitting GCSE English.

Young people who struggle with reading can face significant barriers in post-16 education, particularly when they are required to resit GCSE English alongside their wider studies. The project aimed to help more young people achieve a Level 2 English qualification by age 19. It combined professional development for post-16 teachers with targeted interventions to improve students' reading and vocabulary skills.

The evaluation found that staff confidence and knowledge increased substantially.

Following training:

- 97% reported a better understanding of effective strategies for teaching reading
- 88% felt more confident teaching reading
- 79% felt better prepared to support students with exam resits.

There were also measurable improvements for participating students. Average decoding scores increased substantially. Among students who began below the national average, 67% reached

the average level by the end of the programme. Students also reported greater confidence in their reading skills had increased and that reading was less of a barrier to their studies.

The evaluation also illustrates the scale of the challenge. Before the project, only 24.6% of college staff rated their students' overall reading skills as good or very good, while 79.5% agreed that poor reading skills were a barrier to progression for many students.

Literacy interventions, like these, cannot alone prevent young people from becoming NEET. But they show how targeted support in post-16 education can address a significant barrier to learning, qualifications and progression, helping young people to build the skills and confidence needed to remain engaged in education and move towards employment.



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