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7 Policy Interventions

Targeting NEETs in Different Institutional Settings

Sue Maguire, Mark Levels, Christian Brzinsky-Fay, Janine Jongbloed, and Hirofumi Taki

7.1 Introduction: Policies to reintegrate NEETs

This chapter will consider the types of policy initiatives which have been introduced to address concerns over the ongoing ‘problem’ of not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) young people. In doing so, it is important to understand that the definitions and measures of youth unemployment and NEET differ significantly across nations, with the result that the term NEET is now commonly used to capture disengagement and social exclusion, as well as levels of unemployment among young people. A distinction is often made among those young people who are already NEET, and those who are considered to be ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET. In addition, the labels of ‘early school leaving’ (ESL) or of being ‘disengaged’ are commonly used. ‘Early school leavers’ are defined in different ways by national governments and international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat (European Parliament, 2011). Throughout Europe, this primarily refers to those leaving education at the age of 16,¹ with qualifications below Level 2 of the International Standard Classification of Education (below upper secondary qualification, such as General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) qualifications) and who were not in education or training in the 4 weeks prior to being interviewed for the Labour Force Survey. In the United States, although there is no agreed definition of ESL, it tends to be used in the literature to describe those who leave full-time education before graduation and therefore do not gain their high school diploma (Neild and Balfanz, 2006). ‘Disengaged’ is a broader term that is interpreted in a number of ways, often subsuming the NEET group and early school leavers. It includes disengagement through low or under achievement, and poor attendance at school (Callanan et al., 2009). The literature also defines disengaged in terms of young people’s motivations, attitudes, and behaviour (Morris and Pullen, 2007), as well as incorporating wider definitions, including youth offending and harm (Hull, 2005). Approaches to identifying those who are disengaged from school focus on whether pupils are engaged during their compulsory school age, both in terms of being in school and also being engaged in learning

whilst at school (Ross, 2009). Here, there is a concentration on reducing the likelihood of their becoming ‘disengaged’ by intervening earlier.

When considering policies focusing on NEETs, it is important to understand the distinction between ‘preventive’ and ‘reintegration’ approaches. ‘Preventive’ strategies are early interventions designed to reduce the likelihood of dropout at a later stage. ‘At risk’ young people are identified predominantly on the basis of school-based data, such as their neighbourhood, school, and family background. Reintegration, on the other hand, focuses on those who are already NEET and seeks to introduce measures to re-engage those individuals. This is likely to require the input of a range of agencies and takes place once an individual has fallen out of the system (Dale, 2010).

7.1.1 Early intervention policies

Early intervention policies have been introduced in many countries in an attempt to provide early identification of young people who may be at risk of becoming NEET or dropping out of education. For example, studies in the United States have highlighted the use of ‘early warning systems’ to obviate the likelihood of students dropping out of school (Heppen and Therriault, 2008; Pinkus, 2008). Here, it is important to emphasize that ‘early school leavers’ can include some young people who leave school in order to take up employment or training. They are therefore not identified as being NEET. Approaches for identifying those at risk of becoming NEET are therefore focused on whether young people will remain in education, employment, or training (EET) following the completion of compulsory education. In order to identify those individuals who may be deemed vulnerable or ‘at risk’, Lehr et al. (2004) made a distinction between ‘status variables’ or characteristics, such as ‘socio-economic standing’, family structure and disability, and ‘alterable variables’ or indicators, such as attendance, attainment, and behaviour.

Maguire (2013) noted that the following elements were prevalent in the types of preventive interventions which have been shown to be successful:

- 1 Investment in good quality *Early Childhood Education and Care* to reduce the propensity of ESL/NEET status (Reynolds et al., 2004).
- 2 The use of assessment tools and one-to-one intensive mentoring support to identify, target, and support ‘at risk’ student.
- 3 Offering *financial support* to those from lower income households and other vulnerable groups in order to encourage and sustain their participation in learning (Maguire and Rennison, 2005).
- 4 Within schools:
 - a the introduction of *alternative curricula*;
 - b the provision of more *vocational and technical education*; and
 - c *working in partnership with other organizations*.

- 5 *Identifying the triggers of disengagement* from school.
- 6 *Raising the participation age* at which young people can leave education or training.

7.1.2 Policies to reintegrate NEETs

Reintegration strategy at the level of the individual should involve having systems which identify young people who become NEET and support them to achieve positive outcomes in terms of re-engagement. In order to do this, there needs to be an agency or agencies, which has the capacity and capability to identify and support the breadth of the target population. Moreover, it should be remembered that the NEET population is not homogeneous. As far as specific measures are concerned, outreach services have been shown to be successful but are resource intensive. At the same time, young people who are NEET have been found to need *financial support mechanisms, intensive support* (from trained advisers) and *tailored education, and employment and training solutions* to achieve long-term, sustainable outcomes.

An example of a programme which combined all three types of intervention was Activity Agreements, which was piloted in England between 2006 and 2010 (DfE, 2011). It should be emphasized that this required substantial financial investment. Types of reintegration programmes which have been introduced to support young people's transitions into the labour market include those which

- stimulate the demand for young people in the labour market, through offering wage and training subsidies or tax and national insurance breaks/credits to employers;
- offer a bridge between education and work, through:
 - providing training and work experience; broadening apprenticeship programmes;
 - providing training in entrepreneurship and interpersonal skills; and
 - work preparation courses for young people who lack the immediate skills to enter the workplace;
- identify young people who become NEET or are part of other disadvantaged groups and support them to achieve positive outcomes in terms of re-engagement (including employment).

Policies and programmes which are designed to prevent and reduce unemployment, including for young people who are NEET, are regularly termed active labour market policies (ALMPs). These can broadly be categorized into five types:

- 1 *Job-search assistance*: Measures aimed at helping job search have been found to be as effective as more expensive programmes such as job creation and job subsidies (OECD, 1993). More recently, research has suggested that

job-search assistance and monitoring programmes have positive effects on employment take-up, are cost-effective and work in different settings (Caliendo and Schmidl, 2016). They can also act as an early intervention strategy to reduce such risk. A downside of job-assistance programmes is that they may result in some young people accepting any form of work, including precarious employment, for fear of being sanctioned or by discouraging young people from unemployment registration and withdrawal from the labour market. A reduction in the subsequent earnings of participants was also found to occur in some countries, such as Canada (O'Higgins, 2001).

- 2 *Training programmes*: Internationally, there has been widespread implementation of training programmes to support young people's transitions into the labour market. However, evaluations of training programmes targeted at disadvantaged young people, using predominantly hard outcomes, such as numbers becoming employed, point to poor programme performance (Martin and Grubb, 2001). The absence of a consideration of 'soft' outcomes, such as 'distance travelled', is a shortcoming of such evidence.
- 3 *Subsidized employment*: Subsidized employment may include wage subsidies or wage cost subsidies, both of which are found to have a positive impact on employment outcomes, especially if they are well-targeted towards disadvantaged groups, including young people (Duell, 2012). In times of recession, employment subsidies can play an important role in helping maintain the attachment of young people to the labour market and offer employers training subsidies, as well as incentives to sustain their recruitment.
- 4 *Direct job creation and public employment programmes*: Combining job creation programmes with vocational training is a more expensive model, although it does not necessarily eradicate negative perceptions about programme value. Speckesser et al. (2019), using a macroeconomic database with repeated observations for all EU-Member States for a time series (1998–2012), conclude that older groups in the youth cohort, namely 20–24-year olds, appear to be more likely to benefit from job creation programmes than younger groups. This is attributed to older groups having a greater propensity to have experienced prolonged detachment from the labour market, and from education and training intervention (Speckesser et al., 2019).
- 5 *Start-up subsidies, self-employment assistance, and support* (Eichhorst et al., 2016): Programmes which are designed to encourage young people to become self-employed have been developed in many countries and are popular among policymakers. However, take-up rates tend to be poor. According to O'Higgins (2001: p. 125), self-employment programmes may typically comprise one or several of the following elements:
 - promoting and introducing the self-employment option;
 - training in skills development;

- mentorship;
- financial support;
- access to workspace;
- business expansion support; and
- networking.

In addition to introducing individual ALMPs, policymakers have devised multi-element programmes to form an integrated offer. This may include job search and counselling, education and training, wage incentives, and job creation. The most recent and powerful evidence, which has assessed the extent to which labour market interventions have successfully improved young people's employment outcomes, concluded that programmes which integrate a number of interventions and services are more likely to be successful, in particular in low- and middle-income countries (Kluve et al., 2019). Crucially, being underpinned by effective and efficient profiling and follow-up systems was found to be pivotal to their success.

Shortcomings of ALMPs, which have been voiced in relation to their impact on young people, include the propensity, particularly for training and subsidized employment programmes, to demonstrate large deadweight, substitution, and displacement effects; their tendency to focus on 'work ready' young people, at the expense of 'harder to help' and 'harder to reach' groups; and a lack of evidence about 'what works and at what cost', notably a 'short-sighted' emphasis on measuring job outcomes, rather than on the 'distance travelled' by individuals and the impact which training and/or work experience may have on their attachment to the labour market (Caliendo and Schmidl, 2016). Also, the costs of programmes are often vague, inconsistent, and incomplete.

Overall, ALMPs are unlikely to work for the most disadvantaged groups unless accompanied by re-engagement strategies. Characteristics of programmes which have been found to be effective include:

- being closely targeted rather than generic;
- outreach services to extend and encourage engagement and participation;
- providing intensive support for young people furthest away from the labour market;
- having pre-vocational programmes for low-skilled young people;
- multi-element programmes forming an integrated offer;
- effective and efficient profiling and follow-up systems.

7.1.3 Profiling and tracking

Whether policies are identified as 'preventive' or 'reintegration', there is a weight of evidence about the importance of the role of profiling, early intervention, and following up with those young people who are most vulnerable at early stages of their unemployment/inactivity (Martin and Grubb, 2001,

Quintini et al., 2007). Together they are able to monitor the status of target groups of young people at regular intervals and ensure that appropriate provision is being offered. It has been suggested that with proper targeting and in periods of economic recession, the effects of ALMP participation might be more positive, due to the fact that the volume and range of participants is different to that observed during non-recession periods (Card et al., 2015; Kluge et al., 2016). Mapping and tracking groups of young people that have been identified as being ‘at risk’ of given outcomes are common approaches, which are typically employed by organizations in monitoring the status of target groups of young people at regular intervals and ensuring that appropriate provision is being offered. Green et al. (2001: p. 44) stated that establishing a robust tracking system ‘needs to be regarded as a tool by which support and help may be provided more effectively to individuals, and especially to vulnerable young people’. Where tracking systems have been used to identify those deemed to be at risk and to direct resources efficiently, emphasis has been placed on the importance of joint agency working, coupled with a need to ensure a shared understanding of why particular tracking and monitoring practices are in place. Targeted programmes that are better tailored to meet the needs and abilities of specific groups have been more successful (O’Higgins, 2001). Furthermore, this success is dependent on having in place tracking systems which can produce robust, reliable, and efficient data on young people’s intended and actual destinations alongside accurate labour market information (LMI), which is sensitive to the needs of regional and local labour markets.

7.2 Institutions and policy effectiveness

While the term ‘NEET’ has become embedded internationally as a category to define young people’s detachment from formal education, employment, and training systems, its applicability is fraught with difficulty. In particular, the broadening of the age range of young people defined within the NEET group has coincided with attempts to impose segmentation, in recognition that different groups of young people occupy NEET status for a number of reasons and for differing periods of time. Specific policy interventions to address the needs of this cross-section of subgroups are less in evidence. Moreover, significant variations in how countries apply the term ‘NEET’ make comparisons of population sizes and interventions fraught with difficulties.

Many countries, like France and the UK, have focused on employment remedies to ‘fix’ the NEET agenda, with a succession of short-term initiatives targeted at improving young people’s employability and access to the labour market, and a strong focus on tackling youth unemployment. However, such policy direction risks ignoring, or at best leaving behind certain groups within the NEET population, namely the NEET Economically Inactive (EI)

group and young women with children. That is, the term ‘NEET’ masks their existence and fails to recognize their needs. This points to the need to take down the boundaries between unemployment and economic inactivity, within NEET status, and highlights the existence of a population which is largely isolated and forgotten and to question their disengagement, vulnerability from the labour market and education.

7.2.1 Funding and delivery models

In seeking to establish what programmes will be most effective in addressing, it is axiomatic that it will be highly dependent on the characteristics of the target group and their circumstances. Thereafter, they need to be underpinned by costs, implementation, and performance issues. Although, in general, government funding is responsible for financing programmes, it is often supplemented by contributions from employers through paying a proportion wages or the costs of off-the-job training. The most widely used method of financing programmes is through government funding, which, depending on the type of programme, can be supplemented with contributions from employers. For example, employers may be asked to pay towards trainees’ allowances or the costs of off-the-job training. Since the 1980s, there has been an increased focus in the UK on the use of outcomes-based commissioning and contracts within public services. This follows a trend in most OECD countries, where at least some employment and training programmes are outsourced, although significant differences exist, in terms of where responsibility for purchasing is devolved, how contracts are managed and the degree to which outsourcing is commonplace. As far as cost-effectiveness is concerned, there is a dearth of information, as evaluations of employment programmes do not address the issue. Meta-analyses of youth employment programmes have commented on the lack of standardized information on programme costs, with the result that it is difficult to draw conclusions about how resources could be allocated more efficiently in order to improve outcomes. For example, Kluge et al. (2019: p. 252) conclude ‘*The sporadic presentation of standardized program costs alongside impact evaluation results may be one of the largest remaining gaps in our knowledge of what works and how to improve labour outcomes for youth.*’

7.3 Policies in practice: Examples of successful and unsuccessful policies

7.3.1 The Netherlands

Policies to address the NEET agenda in the Netherlands need to be contextualized in relation to: the small overall size of the NEET population in the country (Eurofound, 2016); the significant regional variation in the prevalence of young people in the NEET group, and finally, the heterogeneous

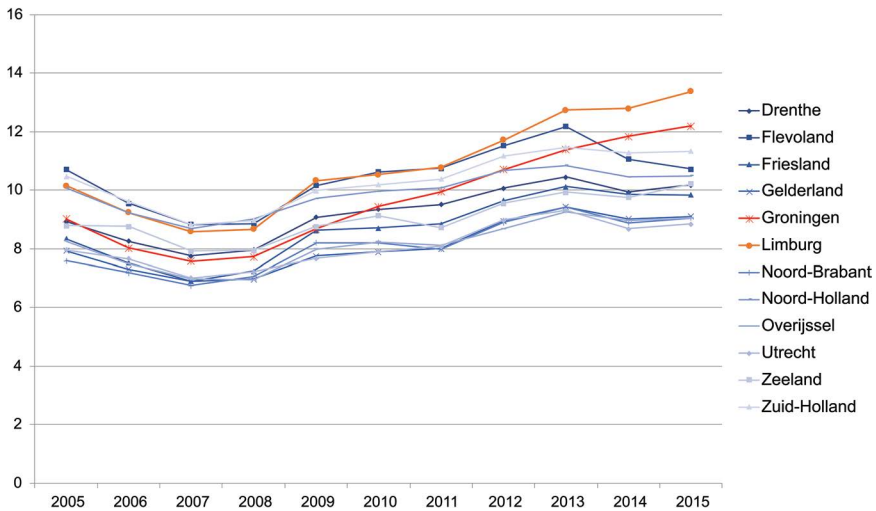


Figure 7.1 Number of NEETs as part of the 15–27-year-old population in Dutch provinces.

nature of the NEET population. Consequently, the small and diverse nature of the NEET group has resulted in a modest government policy response. Specific programmes that affect NEET rates generally target youth unemployment, or specific vulnerable groups.

Figure 7.1 demonstrates NEET trends between 2005 and 2015 across each Dutch province. NEET rates fell in every province until 2008 and rose from that point due to the impact of the financial crisis. Consequently, between 2013 and 2015, NEET rates fell due to enhanced labour market performance, except in the provinces of Limburg and Groningen where they continued to rise above the national average. Limburg has the highest NEET rate due to the structural inequalities that persist from the demise of the mining industry in the 1970s. This has resulted in regional targeted interventions to tackle local disadvantage. There are also a large number of young people in the NEET group who are defined as EI, due to health and/or social issues. This often leads to long-term welfare dependency and labour market detachment. In contrast, many young people (over 50 per cent) in the NEET group across the Netherlands are exposed to NEET status for relatively short periods due to unemployment. With targeted intervention to support their transitions into the labour market, the period of time they spend in the NEET group can be minimized (Dicks and Levels, 2018; Levels et al., 2020). Policies have tended to focus on the young unemployed in the NEET group, who are generally easier to reach and help, with the hardest to help/reach, i.e. young people who are economically active being less of a policy focus (see, for example, Oostveen et al., 2017; Dekker and Bertling, 2019).

Combating early school leaving to prevent NEETs: One of the main predictors for becoming NEET in the Netherlands is ESL. Although the Netherlands has relatively few early school leavers, further reducing their numbers is considered a prime policy objective and the subject of several large-scale policy interventions. Implementation of policies takes place at the regional level, where the responsibility lies with the so-called Regionale Meld-en Coördinatiecentra (RMCs). The RMCs are regional centres, in which schools and municipalities work together to prevent ESL through: identifying and registering young people between the ages of 18 and 23 who neither studying nor attending school; establishing contact with young people and offering tailored support; and establishing and co-working with a network of local stakeholders to tackle ESL. The Netherlands currently has 40 RMCs.

Regional interventions targeted at reducing ESL include: individualized mentoring and coaching; dedicated learning support; information, advice, and guidance (IAG); and tackling health barriers reducing absence for health reasons by tackling underlying problems, or concrete help finding jobs (Rijksoverheid, 2020a). While the creation and execution of plans to reduce ESL takes place at the regional level, national government is tasked with creating the context for regional centres to be successful. This is achieved through: setting ambitious targets; introducing a statutory requirement that makes collaboration between schools and municipalities obligatory; and improving information exchanges and data sharing between key local stakeholders. From 2006, in order to improve the registration system and facilitate the sharing of information, a new plan called *Aanvalsplan Voortijdig Schoolverlaten* [Attack Plan Early School Leaving] was introduced which ensured that every pupil in the Dutch educational system is registered centrally with a unique personal identification number. The number stays the same throughout the educational career and is used by schools to track students' trajectories, including dropout rates. Student data are used to target interventions to curb ESL, including data sharing between schools to identify 'at risk' students (De Witte et al., 2014).

Another recent national policy change was the requirement for all young people to obtain a 'starting qualification'. In the Dutch system, specified diplomas (i.e. HAVO; VWO; MBO levels 2, 3, and 4; and HBO or university; see [Chapter 2](#)) are minimal requirements for labour market entry. Before 2007, the minimum school leaving age was 17, when it was subsequently raised to the age of 18 and, for students without a starting qualification, to the age of 23 years. An evaluation of the effectiveness of this legal requirement found a small short-term reduction in ESL rates (Cabus en De Witte, 2011). Effect evaluations (De Witte et al., 2014) have demonstrated three types of policies that were most successful in reducing ESL rates. These include interventions aimed to reduce absenteeism, grade retention, and intensive counselling (e.g. mentoring, home visits, and personal support to students and parents) (De Witte and Csillag, 2013; De Witte et al., 2014).

Active mediation policies to help NEETs find work: Reintegration policies and ALMPs mostly aim to reduce youth unemployment, and as such target NEETs who are labour market ready. In a similar vein to initiatives targeted at combating ESL, mediation policies largely have a decentralized organization, in which the targets are set by the national government and delivered by regional and local governments. A good illustration of the way in which this works in the Netherlands is a broad policy initiative called the *Youth Unemployment Approach* (YUA), which was initiated nationally between 2015 and 2018 and aimed at creating employment opportunities for young people (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2015a). The programme targeted two groups: (a) young people claiming social assistance or unemployment benefits, and (b) unemployed young people without a labour market ‘starting qualification’ not in receipt of benefits. The overall goal was to match unemployed young people to work opportunities and to bridge the mismatch between young people’s skills and labour market demands. The programme excluded young people who were NEET and EI on the premise that their inactivity was caused by major underlying (psychological, health-related, social, or financial) problems and not by a skills mismatch (cf. Oostveen et al., 2017).

While the YUA programme was initiated and coordinated by national government, it was operationalized by regional governments (municipalities), regional coordination centres to combat ESL (RMCs), and unemployment agencies (UWV). The approaches to implementation of the policy varied widely. In many regions, the various partner institutions cooperated regionally to create an employer service point that could serve to match labour supply to demand. Partners also commonly shared information about vacancies and candidates, engaged in joint mediation, and coordinated mediation targets. They also collaborated with temporary employment agencies, whose pool of low-skilled jobs ensured easy access to work for jobseekers. Some organized matching events or incentivized on-the-job training for early school leavers with vouchers. To ensure effective matching of young people to local labour market opportunities, regions adopted both demand- and supply-oriented strategies. ‘Aftercare’ was also offered in some localities, in which the progress of the newly placed young people would be followed, and potential problems could be addressed (ibid).

Evaluations of the programme (Visee et al., 2016; Oostveen et al., 2017) identified crucial success factors for the YUA programme. First, relevant and up-to-date data about young people were made available. This was achieved by matching various datasets and data sources, in order to maximize intelligence and understanding about the eligible population (Dekker and Bertling, 2019). Second, careful matching between employers and young people was a critical success factor. Third, outreach was important, in order to engage with a wide spectrum of young people and to engender

their confidence. This included working through youth networks in local neighbourhoods and maximizing the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook (*cf.* IZI Solutions, 2016a, 2016b). Successful intervention involved brokering individualized relationships among young job-seekers and employers and mediating relationships to ensure that both sets of needs were met.

7.3.2 *Germany*

ALMPs to support young people who are defined as NEET or classified as unemployed are not widespread in Germany due to the nominal scale of the problem. For example, the 2008 economic crisis did not significantly impact the German economy and consequently, NEET and youth unemployment rates remained low (*cp.* OECD, 2016). Moreover, given these trends, Germany did not qualify for EU funding from the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), which was set up to tackle the significant impact on young people emanating from the 2008 financial crash (Eurofound, 2015). The focus within Germany remains on providing structured qualifications and skills provision to all groups of young people. This has priority over support with job search and social assistance. The general orientation of policy programmes is therefore preventive or early intervention with respect to vocational skills. Young people who leave school and are unable to access suitable for training are prepared for vocational training in the first instance.

The advantage of the structured education-work nexus and the dual system of apprenticeship in Germany is the success in securing and sustaining a high rate of participation among young people in education and training. This is gained by the corporatist organization of skill formation, where employers invest in apprenticeships and, in return, are assured of qualifications and skills that meet their demands. However, the system is highly selective and difficult to navigate for some groups who face specific barriers to labour market entry, most notably migrants and young people with low or no qualifications (OECD, 2016). The requirement of a vocational degree for getting employment leads to higher barriers for those without a degree than in countries, where on-the-job training is predominant.

Targeting specific bottleneck transition points in VET to prevent NEET: Given the institutional setting of the German general and vocational education system (see Chapter 3.2), which provides well-coordinated skill formation, policies are often targeted at specific transition points. Mertens (1976) proposes a ‘2-threshold-model’ in which young people complete two transitions before being integrated into the labour market. These include the transition from school to vocational training and the transition from vocational training to employment within a firm. Both transitions represent markets with different actors and requirements or signals. The vast majority of policies in Germany are located at the first threshold, i.e. between

education and training. Young people who enter the apprenticeship market must demonstrate their suitability for vocational training (*'Ausbildungsreife'*). Employers as providers for training places, as well as vocational schools are the key actors in selecting school leavers for dual apprenticeships or school-based training. At this transition between school and vocational training, policy interventions focus on preparing school leavers, in order to enhance their chances in the apprenticeship market. This is based on five goals (cp. Kohlrausch, 2012):

- 1 Offering second-chance qualification: Young people with low classification degrees or without degrees (school dropouts) can obtain general school degrees at vocational schools (*'Berufsfachschulen'*).
- 2 Vocational orientation: School leavers who are experiencing difficulties in finding suitable vocational training are encouraged to re-evaluate their occupational choices and improve their skills, in order to access VET. This is achieved through participation in the vocational preparatory year (*'Berufsvorbereitungsjahr'*, BVJ). BVJ programmes address barriers young people face to continuing in learning.
- 3 Vocational preparation: School leavers who enter this route are identified as 'training ready' and are helped to prepare for the competitive apprenticeship market. The vocational basic school year (*'Berufsgrundschuljahr'*, BGJ) focuses on young people learning occupational skills, which can be accredited as part of an apprenticeship framework, when they enter the workplace.
- 4 'Glue effects': These interventions support youth transitions into the labour market through creating (and funding) internships or by wage subsidies to firms for providing apprenticeships. These policies are aimed at creating screening opportunities for firms, in which low-achieving school leavers and graduates receive the chance to demonstrate their skills and abilities. Another type of intervention in this category includes the entrance qualification year (*'Einstiegsqualifikationsjahr'*, EQJ). This work preparation programme offers work taster programmes across a number of different occupation settings and includes company-based subsidized internships.
- 5 Preventative measures: These include introducing low-achieving students to the world of work during their general schooling, in order to boost their aspirations and attainment. Here, employment agencies and school authorities cooperate strongly.

Most of these programmes are offered as prevocational courses or 'pre-apprenticeships' (OECD, 2016). Additionally, employment agencies can also provide support to young people who are already in vocational training by offering additional help and intervention. This training-accompanying assistance measure (*'ausbildungsbegleitende Hilfe'*, abH) includes additional learning opportunities, language training, or social pedagogical assistance.

This kind of support is also offered directly by some firms. All these programmes were introduced in the 1970s and aim to prepare young people for apprenticeships or school-based vocational training. Their long durations (1 year or 2 years, if combined) have helped to establish a transition system. Since the 1990s, the number of participants in the transition system has grown to such an extent that it has become labelled by some commentators as the ‘third pillar of German VET system’ (Baethge, 2008; Kohlrausch, 2012), with the other two pillars being the apprenticeship and school-based systems. The growth in the transition system is attributable to an enduring deficit in the supply of training places for young people. Because of the economic upswing and demographic changes, the transition system loses relevance to a small extent, but numerically it remains important.

The establishment and maintenance of the raft of interventions outlined above, which now form an important part of youth transitions into the labour market, have become so engrained that they have changed their focus from being *policy programmes* to *institutional elements* that constitutes (cp. Achatz et al., 2020). While evaluation evidence is broadly positive (e.g. Heyer et al., 2012), some studies have shown that some groups of young people, for example, low-achievers (Caliendo et al., 2011) and migrants (Bergseng et al., 2020) do not benefit to the same extent from participation. The sustained presence of these programmes, which also act as a buffer to support young people in times of recession, has resulted in the absence of targeted interventions to specifically support those in the NEET group. Programmes offered at regional level (*Bundesländer*) focus on one or more of the goals mentioned above. These programmes are developed by the regional employment services and conducted by social agencies or organizations. For example, in Bavaria, the so-called practical classes ‘*Praxisklassen*’ were introduced within low-attaining schools (*Hauptschule*), in order to facilitate internships in firms and to introduce young people to the world of work. The objective of this programme is to motivate students who are disengaged from learning, with ‘real work’ opportunities and to prevent early leaving. Another example is the vocational entrance year (‘*Berufseinstiegsjahr*’, BEJ) in Baden-Württemberg, which is a vocational orientation and work preparation programme targeted at low-attaining school leavers, who are unable to find suitable local training opportunities. Interventions to support young people (and adults) have traditionally been grouped in clusters linked to specific social security codes. For example, the various measures outlined above fall into Social Security Code III (*Sozialgesetzbuch* III). With respect to young people, there are also measures in the SGB VIII, which relates to youth welfare, family support, childcare, etc. and in the SGB II, which comprises basic social assistance. In 2011, one integrated administrative agency was created for young people, following the principle of ‘one-stop-government’, with the aim of providing one

single public service agency, which is able to provide integrated and coordinated support and reduce bureaucracy.

7.3.3 France

Since the 1980s there has been a significant government-led effort in France to address the challenges faced by 16–25-year olds in their transition to adulthood, due to high youth unemployment rates. This has included:

- Increasing educational attainment rates among young people (Giret et al., 2020), as well as government action instigated by the Ministry of National Education called *Mission de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire* (Mission to Combat School Dropout) to reduce the number of young people leaving school without a secondary school diploma (Danner et al., 2020).
- Offering individual support to young people, notably through the *Missions Locales* (Local Missions), to improve the professional and social integration of young people (Aeberhardt et al., 2011).
- Encouraging more employers to recruit young people through the offer of financial incentives, including wage subsidies and tax breaks.
- Implementing the Youth Guarantee, funded by the European Council, which was piloted from October 2013 in a few regions, then extended to the whole country in 2017. It is targeted at supporting 16–25-year olds to access employment or training, in-line with a ‘work first’ strategy (European Commission, 2016).

However, the succession of different employment, educational, and welfare policies have had limited impact on job creation and decreasing youth unemployment (Aeberhardt et al., 2011). Most notably, the French Council of Economic Analysis asserted that the introduction of a multitude of different policies over a 30-year period (more than 80 different measures), without any coherent strategy, has achieved little in terms of eradicating the problem (Cahuc et al., 2013a, 2013b).

There are four types of policy focuses that have been implemented to support young people in the NEET group, which comprise: targeted financial support, further education programmes, work experience and training initiatives, and social assistance programmes. However, individual ALMPs in France have tended to be characterized by overlapping policy domains, which blur the limits between these four categories.

Financial support: Between 2005 and 2017, young people could access a *Contrat d’insertion dans la vie sociale* (Contract for social inclusion, CIVIS) through their Missions Locales or Office for information and guidance. This allowed them to receive an allowance of €900 a month if they were at least 18 years old, had a low level of education, and had no income from work. Alongside this financial support, young people also received personalized

guidance for up to a year from a guidance counsellor or until they found stable employment. Approximately one-and-a-half million young people benefited from this programme, and a third of them found stable employment (Aeberhardt et al., 2011; Gautié, 2018).

Further education: There are a number of programmes that have been put in place in the area of education, but most notable is the *Ecoles de la deuxième chance* (E2C), which has been delivered in over 124 sites in France since 1997. This programme supports 16–25-year olds who are at risk of economic marginalization due to their lack of qualifications and work experience. It offers vocational training of variable length, which is underpinned by financial assistance of 300 euros per month. The goal is for young people to access employment directly following the completion of their training period. It is targeted at young people from low-income backgrounds as well as offering training to obtain recognized qualifications, it provides basic academic education and job search assistance. E2C institutions attempt to take into consideration young people's social situation and potential feelings of exclusion and are built upon a foundation of active pedagogy. They welcome 15,000 young people each year who did not succeed in their first educational pathway and re-engage them with the educational system.

Further education is also available to young people through the French military. From 2005 onwards, the *Établissement public d'insertion de la défense* (EPIDE) has offered training to young people without qualifications or a job in 20 centres across France. Also, since 2011, the *Plateforme de suivi et d'appui aux décrocheurs* (Platform for early school-leavers, PSAD) has tried to guarantee a continued education for young school-leavers through coordination between various programmes. This platform is a coordination effort between *Missions Locales*, E2C, *Pôle Emploi*, and other actors concerned with education and employment in France at all levels (regional, national, etc.).

Work experience and training: Other policies have aimed at easing the school-to-work transition through workplace experience or training programmes. For example, until 2018, the *Emplois d'Avenir* provided subsidized jobs with a training component to help 16–25-year olds in precarious life situations gain work experience. It provided employers with financial assistance in return for recruiting a young person (mainly in the not-for-profit sector). More than a quarter of jobs for young people under the age of 26 were financed by subsidized contracts (Aeberhardt et al., 2011) in 2015 (this comprised 510,000 beneficiaries, including 400,000 apprenticeship contracts).

In 2017, the *Garantie jeunes* (Youth Guarantee) was rolled out throughout France. In order to reach the same population, the 440 *Missions locales jeunes* agree and sign contracts with young people to develop a personalized work and training plan, as well as to offer them financial assistance (Loison-Leruste et al., 2016). This programme is part of a larger initiative (*parcours contractualisé d'accompagnement vers l'emploi et l'autonomie*, PACEA)

that provides support for young people in finding training opportunities and work experience. It benefits from the coordination of the PSAD platform for early school-leavers. Additionally, it offers personalized social and professional guidance to young people. Young people are able to continue to find government-subsidized employment through their *Mission Locale* by signing a *Contrat unique d'insertion* (CUI).

Digital support is offered through the 'Emploi Store', where youth can find help in choosing and finding a job, preparing an application and job interview, or creating a company. The '*Agence France Entrepreneur*' attempts to promote entrepreneurship amongst young people (European Commission, 2016). The government also subsidizes driving classes for young people living in remote areas, to help overcome transport and rural barriers to finding work and training opportunities.

Social assistance programmes for marginalized youth: The *revenu de solidarité active* (RSA) provides financial support to 18–24-year olds who are estranged from their parents, although have some work history or are young single parents. The allocations are approximately 500 euros a month. However, most young people are not eligible for these benefits because of the eligibility criteria. Economic Insertion Structures (*Structures d'Insertion par l'Activité Economique*) allow a select group of youth to access housing along with employment.

The target group of young people who are the focus of these policy initiatives are often those living in the *Zones Urbaines Sensibles*. They experience multiple disadvantages, both socio-economic and geographical, as well as comprising an over-representation of young people who come from migrant backgrounds. These programmes offer young people a top-up income, which is more or less equivalent to the out-of-work benefits (*revenu minimum d'insertion*). However, access to the programmes remains selective. More recently, an association fighting discrimination in hiring practices, called '*Nos quartiers ont du talent*', has partnered with the state to allow young people coming from disadvantaged suburbs to benefit from a 'mentors network' in finding a job and learning how to effectively communicate with potential employers.

The future of these policy initiatives, particularly in the policy areas of further education and training, is unclear. Liberalizing reforms, such as the *Avenir professionnel* law in 2019, have shaken the previously coordinated state-led approach. Private companies can now create training centres (*centres de formation d'apprentis*, CFA) and thus be eligible for financing based on the number of young people enrolled. Furthermore, during the obligatory apprenticeship period of the training, companies employing a young apprentice are paid a financial incentive directly by the government that covers the costs of the young person's wages, which displaced responsibility for training costs.

Overall, despite reaching a large number of youths – over 80 per cent according to the European Commission – public financial aid to support the needs of disaffected and disengaged groups of young people through social

assistance remains relatively small scale (European Commission, 2016; Bussi and Graziano, 2019). Insufficient investment and constantly changing programmes and strategies may exacerbate the negative effects of NEET status in France.

7.3.4 Japan

In post-war Japan, education and employer links were first established at the junior high school level under the cooperation of the Ministry of labour and the Japan Transportation Corporation in the 1950s (Kariya et al. 2000). This linkage has been extended to high school level, but without such a direct coordination by the government. After the high school enrollment rate exceeded 90% in the 1970s, the labour administration shifted its role on managing supply and demand between these institutions. Japanese youth employment policy does not have to tackle unemployment issues seriously prior to the economic downturn in 1990s, because unemployment rate stood around 2 per cent. This low unemployment rate was also made possible by the strong male breadwinner model which imposes women to be the buffers of the labour market. Young people who were not employed and not actively seeking jobs were remained a low government priority.

However, the prolonged recession in the 1990s seriously damaged the youth labour market. This economic downturn not only worsened Japanese youth employment chances but also damaged the employment practice based on long-term relationship between high schools and workplaces as explained in Chapter 6. The strong internal labour markets (ILMs) of Japanese management practice made it difficult for young people to re-enter the labour market even after the economic recovery, because. The periodic recruiting of new graduates is one of the important components of such practice. A marked increase in the number of times that the term ‘NEET (Niito)’ and ‘Fleeter’ is used at the end of 1990s signified recognition of a growing problem.

The term ‘NEET’ was first introduced in Japanese policy circles by a 2003 report, which was published by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT), an independent administrative agency related to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. It received widespread attention following the publication of the book called “Niito” in 2004 (Genda and Maganuma 2004). Partly due to these influences, the Japanese government developed the term ‘Niito’ as follows 15–34-year olds who are unmarried, not seeking work, express no desire to work, not engaged in any kind of education or training, and not mainly engaged in housework (see Chapter 6). The most crucial difference between NEET and Niito was that the latter excluded unemployed young people who were actively seeking work, as well as married females. As a result, Niito limits its scope to the most inactive groups, apart from significant numbers of young women who are defined as EI due to their marital status.

In 2003, the ‘Youth Independence/Challenge Support Strategy Conference’ was established by government to address the problem. Various initiatives were subsequently developed based on the ‘Action Plan for Youth Independence and Challenges’ (December 2004), which became a policy framework to tackle youth unemployment. In 2004, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare also established the ‘Young Employment Counterplan Office’. The main objectives of the 2004 action plan are as follows: (a) to promote career education, (b) to increase youth motivation to find employment, (c) to promote in-work progression, (d) to run work cafes as a resource to support young people, and (e) to raise public interest in and awareness of youth unemployment issues. The focus of these policy developments was to improve young people’s employability rather than tackle the underlying structural problems relating to the causes of youth unemployment and increased levels on job insecurity (Kanazaki, 2017).

The first sign of change came with the publication of the interim report ‘Re-challenge Promotion Conference’ in 2006 which focused on labour supply problems, specifically, non-regular employment and the promotion of career development pathways. This was followed by the 2015 ‘Law on Promotion of Youth Employment’ which established a legal basis for youth policies. However, despite recent decrease of the youth unemployment rates due to the declining population, government policies do not seem to be fully effective. Large companies still retains periodic recruiting of new graduates connected with internal promotion which constitutes strong ILM. Young people who fail to make smooth transitions between school and work are in a serious condition on an ongoing basis under such institutional configuration.

Japanese NEETs countermeasures have traditionally been carried out within the wider framework of unemployment countermeasures. Prior to 1990, young people were out of the scope to be covered with policy, as most of them got a stable job. However, since the 1990s, employment problems of young people became obvious, and measures for youth out of stable employment (i.e. NEETs and Fleeters) have been implemented.

Trial employment to increase employment opportunities: Training programmes are generally not successful in Japan. Japanese companies recruit young people right after school graduation, and develop employees’ skills through on-the-job training under the practice of long-term employment. Because of this strong ILM, applicants with externally acquired skills generally end up in non-regular employment with low wages, instability, and insufficient training opportunities. The Japanese government has trying to launch a system to promote recruitment in order to overcome this situation through trial employment. However, this programme has not been effective enough in reducing the number of NEETs because of skill formation systems relying on firm-specific skills prevalent in Japanese society.

Reintegration programmes for NEETs with health problems:

Although employment policies targeting young people are concentrated on who are labour market ready (including the unemployed and those in precarious employment), other interventions for NEETs do exist. This includes initiatives targeted at the NEET inactive group (including social withdrawal youth called “Hikikomori” for instance). The ‘Youth independence cram school’ (2005–2010), and ‘Regional youth support station’ (2006–to date) backed up by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare aim to encourage young people through undertaking volunteer activities, taking business seminars, and experiencing workplace apprenticeship through cooperative relationships with companies and so on. Some young people are housed in communal living environments that provide housing and meals to take social support via music therapy and psychological counselling interacted with local community. These programmes aim to build social connections, thereby leading to subsequent occupational and social independence. They strongly rely on providing close personal support, although sometimes they lack the infrastructure to ensure the quantity of provision needed. This is attributable to the governance structure, i.e. the programme is not executed by government administrators but by NPOs (non-profit organizations), who are too few in number to supply support for the number of young people who need it.

In general, from the above, it can be said that Japan’s countermeasures against NEETs have the following four problems.

- A lack of skills or qualification scheme which can effectively use under the context of strong ILM and predominant employment practice of Japanese large companies
- A social security system which has limited funding to support NEET initiatives.
- A lack of sustainable intervention to support young people in key policy areas, such as employment, welfare, and housing.
- A need for improved targeted, individualized, and ongoing support mechanisms.

7.3.5 The United Kingdom

The past 40 years have seen a plethora of policy initiatives introduced across the UK in response to fluctuating, yet stubbornly persistent NEET rates. Within the UK, responsibility for the NEET agenda is complex, as there is no UK-wide NEET policy or strategy. While the UK government retains responsibility for welfare-related policies (except in Northern Ireland) and NEET policy in England, the devolved administrations, i.e. the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Government are able to develop and implement their own NEET policy initiatives.

Youth obligation support programme: Before the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, the sole policy intervention targeted specifically at economically

active young people within the NEET group was the Youth Obligation Support Programme (YOSP), which was introduced in England, Scotland, and Wales in 2017, but not in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, rather than applying to the whole 18–24 age group, it was restricted to 18–21-year olds who are new claimants to Universal Credit (UC). Participants are provided with intensive support for up to 6 months, after which they are expected to move into some form of EET. This initiative is considerably smaller than earlier comparable programmes, such as the Work Programme and the Youth Contract, which, with bigger budgets and wider coverage, had a degree of success in terms of EET outcomes (Newton et al., 2014; National Audit Office, 2014). Key criticisms of the implementation of the YOSP are:

- The concentration on areas operating the new welfare system of UC, rather than targeting areas of high youth unemployment.
- Focusing on new claimants, rather than encompassing young people who are long-term unemployed 18–21-year olds who are actively seeking work.
- It has been reported that large numbers of young people are leaving the programme with unrecorded destinations (*Independent* 16 June 2018).

Second, while there is commonality across the UK about who is defined as NEET and the age group that it embraces, that is 16–24-year olds, there are significant differences between the four nations with regard to the range and scope of interventions to support young people defined as NEET. Thus, where a young person happens to live within the UK shapes the scale and type of support that they will receive. Furthermore, the impact of austerity has led to key differences between the four nations in terms of how interventions to support the NEET group are being sustained (if at all), the funding sources employed, and the role and type of different delivery agents in programme implementation. Overall, there is a scattergun approach to policy-making (Maguire and Keep, forthcoming).

Another overarching issue to consider in relation to NEET policy in the UK is that, since 2010, a combination of austerity measures, budget cuts, and, more recently, the policy focused on Brexit, has pushed the NEET agenda further down the list of priority areas. The overall impact of these factors has seen a reduction in the interventions available to support young people who are NEET, and significant disparities in this support, depending on where they live (Maguire, 2015). Victims of the cuts have included the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which gave young people from lower income families a financial incentive to continue in post-16 learning,² and Activity Agreement pilots, which provided financial support, intensive support, and tailored learning packages to young people in the under 18s NEET group. Perhaps the greatest loss was the demise of the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) programme, which was introduced in 1998.

New Deal for Young People: The multi-element NDYP was operational for a considerable period of time (1998–2010) before being abandoned, as part of austerity measures. This large-scale programme was funded through the UK Government having levied a £5.2 billion Windfall Tax on the privatized utilities in 1997 to pay for its welfare to work programme. The first key element of NDYP was a 4-month period of intensive and supported job search – the gateway period. This was followed by entrance into one of four options, if the young person remained unemployed after the gateway period:

- employment option offering subsidized support;
- full-time education and training; voluntary sector option, or
- the environment task force option.

Extensive evaluation of NDYP provided robust evidence about its overall impact. For example, Van Reenen (2003) and De Georgi (2005) found that the NDYP raised the number of people going into work by 5 percentage points (a 20 per cent increase) and that the costs (net of benefit payments) were more than justified by the savings.

Reintegration of NEETs through the youth contract: The only national NEET intervention introduced by the coalition government was the Youth Contract, which was launched in 2012. It spanned two government departments, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) covering the UK and the Department for Education (DfE), which operated the programme for 16- and 17-year olds in England. The aim of the YC was to assist young people aged between 16 and 24 who were NEET. The statistical results from the delivery of the YC for 18–24-year olds show that only a nominal 2070 YC wage incentive payments were made to employers for young people who completed the full 26 weeks employment between June 2012 and May 2013 (Jordan et al., 2013). The evaluation of the scheme highlighted that take-up had been slower than anticipated largely due to providers being unable to identify the eligible population. From the providers' perspective, the programme was underfunded, and that its funding mechanism focused too heavily on the delivery of hard outcomes, i.e. progression to EET provision in relatively short time periods (Newton et al., 2014). The YC was the first youth training programme in the UK that operated through an outsourced and payment by results (PbR) delivery model. It was never piloted before being fully rolled out and its performance was questionable. For example, a £126 million budget (Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2012) for the YC for 16- and 17-year olds was spent to engage fewer than 20,000 young people and to achieve sustained outcomes for approximately 2,500 of them (March 2014 figures).

Perhaps in response to budget cuts and austerity measures, the DWP in the UK has, in recent years, sought alternative funding models to support policy implementation targeted at NEET prevention and re-engagement of

young people who had become NEET. Most notable has been the use of Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) in England. SIBs comprise capital generated from social investors to fund delivery services which act on behalf of government to achieve social outcomes, using a payment-by-results funding model. For example, in the UK, a social investment bank has been created, which is called Big Society Capital (BSC). BSC is an independent financial institution funded through an investment of £50 million from each of the four large banks – Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds Banking Group, and Royal Bank of Scotland, as well as funding from the Dormant Accounts Scheme. It aims to utilize finance from capital markets for social purposes (McHugh et al., 2013). The Innovation Fund Pilot (2012–2015), with a budget of £30 million, and the Youth Engagement Fund (2014–2017), totalling £16 million, were both funded using SIBs.

Issues and problems with NEET programmes in the UK: While there is consistency across the UK in terms of who is defined as NEET (16–24-year olds), including the distinction between young people in the NEET group in terms of EI or EA status, there is no policy framework or intervention funded by the UK government which addresses their very different needs. Emphasis has been placed on reducing the number of young people who are classified as ‘unemployed’ and nearest to the labour market through a variety of UK-wide programmes. Increasingly, each of the four UK nations offers a different set of policies, which is leading to a growing diversification in policymaking and practice emerging across the UK.

Another significant feature is the strategic importance of EU funding and programmes to support the needs of young people in the NEET group across the UK. This has increased since 2010, due to UK government-led austerity measures and budget cuts that have impacted the availability of other funding sources. Significantly, the UK did not implement the Youth Guarantee programme, on the grounds that similar provision already existed, most notably through the UK-wide Youth Contract programme, which was targeted at 16–24-year olds. Subsequently, this programme, which offered a range of provision to young people in the NEET group, was wound up in 2015 (Maguire, 2015).

At the same time, the UK has benefited substantially from the huge investment in the YEI and the European Social Fund (ESF), which are the key EU financial resources to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee for the 2014–2020 programming period. For example, the YEI attracted overall funding of €8.8 billion in 2017 (European Commission, 2018). YEI is targeted at regions with rates of youth unemployment which exceed 25 per cent and associated economic inactivity, and funds initiatives such as increasing apprenticeships, traineeships, job placements, and qualification attainment. Concerns have been expressed about what will happen post-Brexit to NEET projects, programmes, and initiatives which are currently supported by YEI and ESF funding (Maguire and Keep, forthcoming).

Apart from in Northern Ireland,³ the DWP has primary responsibility for managing welfare support for all groups (including 16–24-year olds who are NEET). In the UK, young people who claim inactivity benefits (the majority of whom are women) tend to be welfare dependent for much longer periods than their counterparts who are registered as unemployed and are actively seeking work. Research by Cooke (2013) found that over half of young people (under 25 years) claiming welfare support due to economic inactivity (as opposed to unemployment) had been in receipt of benefit for over a year.

Another issue identified in research is the position of young women who have NEET EI status and are often ‘written off’ because of the types of welfare support they may claim, resulting in them receiving limited support or intervention (Maguire, 2017). Moreover, no distinction is made between whether they are young mothers, carers or have physical and/or mental health issues (*ibid*). However, the advent of welfare reforms in the UK over recent years, most notably the introduction and gradual roll-out of the new welfare programme in the UK from 2013, namely UC, has fundamentally changed how welfare assessments are calculated. As far as young women who are EI due to childcare responsibilities are concerned, the length of time that they are able to claim UC before being expected to (re)enter the labour market has been reduced.

In England, for example, government has rowed back from ownership of the delivery of interventions to young people in the NEET group, leaving the role of charities and philanthropy to be amplified in recent years, in terms of determining what is available and where. While this has enabled some organizations to take an active role in supporting their local communities, it raises very important questions about coverage, quality, and availability of provision, as well as whether funding for interventions should be so heavily reliant on charity and philanthropy.

At the same time, it was apparent from the evidence from recent research (Maguire and Keep, forthcoming) that charities across the UK play a very important role in delivering EU/government led initiatives, particularly in identifying and supporting hard-to-help/hard-to-reach groups and by acting as a powerful lobby on government. This centres around the outreach work undertaken by local community-based charities, which enables programmes to engage with young people who fail to register or engage with statutory support or welfare services.

Three key issues facing the NEET in the UK are:

- 1 While the UK as a whole has embraced a wider definition of the NEET group, this has failed to be accompanied by mechanisms to map and track the wider population coherently. The focus has remained on tracking the destinations of the 16–18-year-old group, despite evidence which suggests that the post-18-group struggle with adult employment services.

- 2 Although there is an array of policy interventions, there remains a paucity of evidence about what works, and when and where to support young people who are defined as 'NEET'. Too many young people churn between different programmes and initiatives without coherence or planning. The implementations of all-age employability services with a much greater emphasis on voluntary participation in Wales and Scotland are examples of innovative practice which should be carefully monitored for wider implementation.
- 3 Most existing programmes and initiatives have issues relating to their sustainability, due to their funding being time-limited and to a lack of strategic overview. This also raises questions around value for money, when programmes and their expected outcomes are subject to constant change and review.

7.4 Conclusions

The vexing issue of how to minimize the NEET population, which includes the young unemployed and young people who are EI, continues to challenge policymakers. This chapter has demonstrated that interventions fall into two broad groupings. First, there are early intervention measures, which are designed to prevent young people from becoming NEET in the first place. ESL measures, such as those adopted in the Netherlands, are a good example of this type of intervention. Second, a whole range of ALMPs have been adopted in a number of different countries to reduce the size of the NEET population and to act as reintegration programmes. Multidimensional programmes which combine a selection of re-engagement programmes and outreach measures, in order to reach the breadth of the population have been shown to be most effective.

Research evidence tells us that introducing 'knee-jerk' policies without understanding the needs of young people and the labour market can be both costly and damaging. Programme evaluation has highlighted the importance of targeting. Achieving this objective is dependent upon having in place tracking systems which can produce robust, reliable, and efficient data on young people's intended and actual destinations alongside accurate LMI, which is sensitive to the needs of regional and local labour markets.

It is also crucially important that programmes and interventions are designed to identify and engage with all groups of young people, not only the 'labour market ready'. This involves recognizing and meeting the needs of all groups of young people, including the hardest to help/reach and young people who are defined as EI, due to their caring responsibilities or ill health (including the growing number of young people with mental health problems). Establishing or maintaining services which facilitate early identification and early intervention are critical components to improve the effectiveness of ALMPs. This process is enhanced by

offering young people who require support an individualized and person-centred approach. Moreover, on-programme support and follow-up once young people enter the labour market are also likely to improve sustainability impacts. The evidence suggests that a ‘one size fits all approach’ simply will not work and that a range of interventions, while costly, will be needed to meet the diverse needs of the NEET population. While there will be assertions that the financing of delivering such ambitions may be prohibitive, a counterargument must be that the repercussions from failing successive generations of young people remain both unacceptable and short-sighted.

Notes

1. The OECD definition is focused on 20–24-year olds.
2. EMA is still in operation in Scotland and Wales.
3. The devolved executive and assembly in Northern Ireland which have powers over welfare policy collapsed in January 2017 and was reinstated in February 2020.

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