

Statistical bulletin

Characteristics of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET), England: March 2021

Sociodemographic, health, education and employment characteristics of young people (aged 16 to 24 years) who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) in England in 2021. These estimates are derived from Census 2021 data and are not comparable with our headline UK estimates of young people who were NEET using Labour Force Survey data.

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Correction

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We have corrected an error in the 'Main Points'. The fifth bullet incorrectly stated "Almost eight times as many females...". This has been corrected to "Over five times as many females...". There were no errors with the actual percentages. We apologise for this error.

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1 . Main points

- In the 2021 Census, around one in eight females (12.9%) and one in seven males (14.1%) aged 16 to 24 years in England reported not being in education, employment, or training (NEET).
- Young people who were NEET were unemployed (females 34.2%, males 50.2%), or economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability (females 11.4%, males 13.3%), looking after family or home (females 28.0%, males 6.0%), or other reasons (females 26.4%, males 30.5%).
- Almost two in five young people who provided 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week were NEET (females 39.9%, males 38.7%), compared with around one in eight young people who provided no care (females 12.6%, males 13.7%).
- The prevalence of a past hospitalisation for chronic mental health and behavioural conditions was around three times higher for young people who were NEET (females 8.3%, males 3.2%), compared with young people in education, employment, or training (females 2.7%, males 1.3%).
- Over five times as many females in the NEET population (31.9%) had experienced a birth prior to census day, compared with those who were in education, employment, or training (5.8%).
- Young people with any record of having a special educational need (SEN) and or disability, had a higher prevalence of being NEET (females 16.2%, males 18.7%) than those without such a record (females 7.6%, males 8.8%).
- Young people who were ever eligible for free school meals (FSM) had a higher prevalence of being NEET (females 16.1%, males 19.2%) when compared with those who were never eligible (females 6.9%, males 8.9%).
- The percentage of those who were NEET who were never employed in the four financial years following census day was nearly eight times higher for females (33.6%), and just under 3.5 times higher for males (28.5%), compared with young people who were in education, employment, or training on census day (females 4.4%, males 8.3%).

The estimates of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) presented in this release are derived from the Census 2021 population. They are not comparable with our estimates of young people who were NEET using data from the Labour Force Survey.

This work has been commissioned from the Office for National Statistics by the Department for Work and Pensions and NHS England.

In this bulletin, we present a subset of the characteristics we examined in our young person population, by sex. Our [accompanying datasets](#) include additional breakdowns by:

- age group
- region and upper-tier local authority (UTLA)
- rural or urban classification
- ethnic group
- country of birth
- whether English was their main language
- relative area deprivation
- highest level of qualification (for people aged 23 years and over)
- self-reported general health
- self-reported disability status
- chronic conditions
- deaths
- SEN and or disability
- past and future employment
- average future earnings

2 . Data on the characteristics of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET), England: March 2021

[Sociodemographic, health, and employment characteristics of young people who are NEET, England: March 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 27 March 2026

Sociodemographic, health, and employment characteristics of young people (aged 16 to 24 years) who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) in England in 2021. These estimates are derived from Census 2021 data and are not comparable with our headline UK estimates of young people who were NEET using Labour Force Survey data.

[Special educational needs \(SEN\), disability, and eligibility for free school meals of young people who are NEET, England: March 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 27 March 2026

Special educational needs (SEN), disability, and free school meal eligibility of young people (aged 16 to 24 years) who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) in England in 2021. These estimates are derived from Census 2021 data and are not comparable to our headline UK estimates of young people who were NEET using Labour Force Survey data.

3 . Glossary

Age-standardised percentage

Age-standardised percentages allow us to make comparisons between populations that contain different proportions of people of different ages.

In this analysis, we calculated age-standardised percentages as the weighted sum of age-specific proportions in discrete age bands (from 16 to 18 years, and per each year over 18 years), multiplied by 100.

When estimating the prevalence of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) within population characteristics (for example, ethnic groups, or health conditions), we standardised percentages using age-specific weights representing the age distribution of the total young person population in the study. Therefore, the reported age-standardised percentages represent the estimated percentage if each group had the same age distribution as the total young person population.

When estimating the prevalence of characteristics (for example, major health conditions) in the NEET population, as compared with the rest of the young person population (those who are in education, employment, or training), we standardised percentages using age-specific weights representing the age distribution of the NEET population. Therefore, the reported age-standardised percentages for the population who are in education, employment, or training represent the estimated percentage if this group had the same age distribution as the NEET group.

Chronic health conditions

We defined chronic health conditions according to the 2014 article [Estimating the prevalence of chronic conditions in children who die in England, Scotland and Wales: a data linkage cohort study](#), by Hardelid et al.

In it, the authors defined chronic health conditions as "any health problem likely to require follow-up for more than one year, where follow-up could be repeated hospital admission, specialist follow-up through outpatient department visits, medication or use of support services".

Using inpatient records in the NHS Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) Admitted Patient Care (APC) dataset, we identified young people with any past hospitalisation where they had any of the following chronic health conditions in their diagnosis information (based on the [International Classification of Diseases' 10th revision \(ICD-10\) codes](#)):

- cancers and blood conditions
- cardiovascular conditions
- chronic infections
- metabolic, endocrine, digestive, renal, and genitourinary conditions
- neurological conditions
- respiratory conditions
- mental health and behavioural conditions
- musculoskeletal and skin conditions
- non-specific chronic health conditions

Eligibility for free school meals

Free school meals (FSM) are a statutory benefit available to school-aged children whose families receive other qualifying means-tested benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions. Families need to register for them, though not all families entitled to FSM claim them. School census data record only where learners are both eligible and register a claim. FSM is a commonly used proxy measure for socio-economic disadvantage (including household income deprivation) during childhood. More information is available in the Department for Education's [Schools, pupils and their characteristics statistics](#).

Not in education, employment, or training

We determined whether individuals in our study population were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) on census day using the census variables on full-time education and economic activity, as described in our [Census 2021 variables by topic dictionary](#).

We exempted any individual who described themselves as being in full-time education from NEET status. For individuals who were not in full-time education, we used the variable describing their economic activity in the last seven days. Where an individual reported being "Economically active: employed" or "Economically inactive: student", they were exempt from NEET status.

People were categorised as being NEET when not in full-time education and reporting being:

- economically active: unemployed
- economically inactive: long-term sick or disabled
- economically inactive: looking after family or home
- economically inactive: other

See our [accompanying datasets](#) for more information on how we defined the NEET population.

Our measure of NEET status is not comparable to our measure of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). For more information on NEET estimates from the LFS, see our [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\), UK: May 2022 methodology](#).

The LFS-based measure exempts individuals from NEET status using a wider range of questions relating to the educational courses and qualifications they are currently enrolled in (or waiting to start), job-related training or education undertaken in the last four weeks, and whether individuals are on a government training scheme. Comparatively, our measure draws on census answers, as described above.

Past hospitalisation

Where individuals had a completed hospital inpatient provider spell record, we flagged them as having a past hospitalisation. A hospital inpatient provider spell is a continuous period of care under a single NHS hospital provider. Only valid spells were included for people who had an admission and discharge date recorded. Completed spells were included where the admission date started prior to census day in 2021. Inpatient data does not include records from accident and emergency admissions, or outpatient appointments.

Special educational need and or disability

We identified young people as having a special educational need (SEN) and or disability if they had any record of SEN and or disability at least once on any education dataset. School censuses record children's SEN status as reported by the school. The further and higher education datasets record learners' self-assessment of their disability, learning difficulty, or health problem. More information on how we have defined SEN and disability is available in our [accompanying dataset](#).

Unpaid care

Unpaid carers may look after, give help, or support anyone who has long-term physical or mental ill health conditions, illness, or problems related to old age. This does not include any activities as part of paid employment. We defined this help as within or outside the carer's household.

4 . Data sources and quality

Linked datasets

We linked Census 2021 data to administrative records on health, births, deaths, and employee earnings. Our de-identified, linked panel dataset includes data from:

- NHS Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) Admitted Patient Care (APC) records from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2023
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) death registrations, covering deaths occurring from 21 March 2021 to 31 December 2024 that were registered by 31 December 2024
- ONS birth registrations, covering births occurring from 1 January 2010 to 21 March 2021
- Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) records from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2025

We linked Census data to these datasets using the NHS Personal Demographics Service (PDS). More information on this is available in our [Census 2021 to Personal Demographics Service linkage report methodology](#).

We also linked HMRC records to Census IDs using the UK Statistics Authority's Demographic Index, as detailed in their [Evaluating Statistical Quality in the Demographic Index \(PDF, 549KB\) publication](#). More on this approach is available in our [2021 Census linkage to DWP master key and encrypted NINo methodology](#).

We calendarised PAYE RTI data in line with our [Monthly earnings and employment estimates from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information \(PAYE RTI\) data: methods methodology](#). More information on this is also available in our [Explaining income and earnings: important questions answered methodology](#). Where an individual had a Census ID linking to multiple monthly PAYE records, we summed earnings across all matching records for each month.

We imputed negative monthly employee earnings records to be zero, and deflated monthly employee earnings to 2023 prices using our [Consumer Price Index including owner occupier's housing costs \(CPIH\) dataset](#).

We defined being a paid employee as receiving monthly earnings greater than £0. For the earnings analyses, we aggregated future earnings from monthly-level to annual-level from the financial year ending (FYE) 2022 to FYE 2025.

Separately, we linked the Census 2021 population of young people in England to educational records. Our de-identified, linked panel dataset includes data from:

- English School Census records of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision and free school meals eligibility (academic year ending (AYE) 2011 to AYE 2021)
- Individualised Learner Record on learning difficulty, disability, or health problem, as reported by the learner (AYE 2016 to AYE 2021)
- Welsh School Census records of SEN provision (AYE 2011 to AYE 2021)
- Lifelong Learning Wales Record on learning difficulty, disability, or health problem, as reported by the learner (AYE 2011 to AYE 2021)
- Higher Education Statistics Agency on disability status, as reported by the learner (AYE 2011 to AYE 2021)

We linked the education datasets to Census 2021 using the 2021 Statistical Population Dataset (SPD) version 4.3, detailed in our [Developing Statistical Population Datasets, England and Wales: 2021 article](#), as the population spine.

We linked census and educational data to the SPD by using lookup information on the Demographic Index, as detailed in our [Understanding quality of the Statistical Population Dataset in England and Wales using the 2021 Census - Demographic Index linkage article](#), using version 4.0.1 or 4.2 (depending on the data source).

Using the SPD as the population spine resulted in a smaller overall population for our analysis of education data.

We describe the data security processes we use in our [Using the power of linked data to understand factors preventing people from working blog post](#). Information on how and why we de-identify the datasets used in this analysis is described in Section 5: Data sources and quality of our [The impact of bariatric surgery on monthly employee pay and employee status, England: April 2014 to December 2022 article](#).

The UK Statistics Authority's [National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee](#) provided ethical approval for this work.

Inclusion criteria

We derived our study's population of young people from those who responded to the 2021 Census. People were included if:

- they were usually resident in England on census day
- they were aged 16 to 24 years on census day

For inclusion in our analyses of census characteristics, chronic health conditions, births, and deaths, we required individuals to have a census record in 2021 that could be linked to the PDS (4,772,410 young people; linkage rate: 90.4%).

For inclusion in our analyses of HMRC employment and earnings information, we required people to be linked to the PDS, the Demographic Index, and PAYE RTI data (4,575,635 young people; linkage rate: 86.7%).

For inclusion in analyses of census linked to education datasets, we required people to have a census record in 2021 that could be linked to at least one valid SEN and or disability record (with "No SEN and or disability" being a valid entry). There were 4,428,245 young people with Census 2021 data in the SPD, and 3,733,850 (84.3%) had at least one education record with a valid SEN and or disability record.

For our analysis of free school meal eligibility, we required people to have a census record in 2021 that could be linked to at least one valid English School Census record (2,775,645 young people).

For our analyses of HMRC employment and earnings information, we linked death registrations to individuals to infer whether they had died during the study period. We removed anyone who had died in the period following census day from our estimates of future earnings for the financial years including and after their date of death. We also removed all of those who died during the study period for estimates of being employed in the future, up to FYE 2025.

We restricted estimates relating to births prior to census day to people who reported their sex as female in the 2021 Census.

Full counts of the study population at each stage of data cleaning are available in our [accompanying datasets](#).

Estimates

We present age-standardised percentages of NEET prevalence by characteristics (sociodemographic factors, chronic health conditions, births, deaths, special educational needs, and labour market outcomes), and age-standardised percentages of characteristic prevalence by NEET status.

We also present estimates of average earnings by NEET status from PAYE RTI in the four financial years following the 2021 Census. More information, including the full set of age-standardised percentages, crude percentages, and sample summaries are available in our [accompanying datasets](#).

Quality

Census 2021 questions do not allow us to assign NEET status using the same set of questions that are available in the LFS (see [Section 3: Glossary](#) for more details). For this reason, our estimates differ and are not comparable with our official NEET estimates. It is also possible that some of the people identified as NEET in our analysis may be in training or studying part-time; have completed job-related education or training in the last four weeks; or are waiting to start a course.

The PAYE data cover employees only. Therefore, self-employed people are recorded as earning £0 and categorised as "not a paid employee" for the purposes of this analysis (approximately 13% of working people are self-employed rather than employees, as recorded in our Labour Force Survey's [EMP14: Employees and self-employed by industry dataset](#)).

We also categorise people who are employed but not currently earning (for example, on maternity leave and not receiving maternity pay) as "not a paid employee". We do not have reliable data on hours worked and are not able to distinguish sick pay, or other non-regular pay including maternity pay, from regular pay.

Our education dataset coverage excludes privately educated and homeschooled students, and individuals who are resident in England but attending school and further education outside England or Wales.

5 . Related links

[Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\), UK: March 2021](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 4 March 2021

Estimates of young people (aged 16 to 24 years) who are not in education, employment, or training, by age and sex.

[NEET age 16 to 24, Calendar year 2021](#)

Statistics | Released 3 March 2022

UK Government's Department of Education estimates from the Labour Force Survey of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) in England.

[Comparing Census 2021 and Labour Force Survey estimates of the labour market, England and Wales: 13 March 2023](#)

Article | Released 13 March 2023

Comparing the percentages of adults in employment and other labour market data between Census 2021 and the Labour Force Survey, and reasons why they differ.

6 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 27 March 2026, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Characteristics of young people not in education, employment, or training \(NEET\), England: March 2021](#)