

Sharp increases in British youth without jobs or education prospects

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The number of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) in England has risen to just short of the 1 million mark, a record level.

At the end of June 2011, 979,000 NEETs were recorded, taking the number of young people affected to one in six 16-to-24-year-olds.

Youth unemployment stands at nearly 1 million, and thousands of young people are in a desperate struggle for a place at university before the fees rise from £3,000 to £9,000 a year in September 2012.

The latest figures demolish the Conservative/Liberal-Democrat government's claims that there were no underlying social causes for the eruption of anger expressed in the inner city riots last month.

The recent data shows an increase of 107,000 NEETs over the same time last year as an immediate consequence of the cuts to education and youth provision. This is equal to 18.4 percent of young people of that age group across the country.

The situation for 19-to-24-year-olds is even worse, standing at 794,000 or 19.1 percent. This is the highest number since 2006. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, this is the biggest annual increase since records began in 2000.

The areas that have seen the largest NEET increases have been in regions that have seen some of the most sweeping and vicious cuts to youth services. These are in the North West, the east of England and London—with increases of 36, 27 and 20 percent, respectively.

Some 141,000 young people are classed as NEETS in the North West. In Manchester, one of the North West's two main cities, the Labour Party-run city council has cut its entire youth service provision. In adjoining Salford, the city council has made a 30 percent cut to all its youth-related spending.

Norfolk County Council, which covers the east of England, has cut all its £4.8 million funding for youth services.

In London, Haringey borough council has slashed its spending on youth services by £3.14 million this year and plans to reduce this even further next year to £1.37 million. In Lambeth, the youth service budget was cut from £8.19 million in 2010/2011 to £6.22 million in 2011/2012. In Ealing, spending on young people dropped from £3.77 million in 2010/2011 to £3.26 million in 2011/2012.

When the NEET figures were released, great play was made of the fact that the number of 16-to-18-year-olds affected had dropped from 10.2 percent in June 2010 to 9.8 percent this year. However, this figure does not take into account this year's school leavers, who will find it increasingly difficult to find work due to the high levels of unemployment or to maintain a place in further education—in large part due to the abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

The EMA, which provided financial support for low-income 16-to-19-year-olds, has been replaced by a means-tested bursary for those living in households receiving under £16,000. Although limited, thousands of families have relied on this income to enable their children to attend further education courses at college or to stay on at school.

Not only will fewer young people attend college, but college teaching staff numbers have been cut. The criteria for college courses funding has also changed, so that if a young person is unable to show progress through the year, he or she can be refused a place to continue studies. Students with a range of Special Educational Needs are particularly affected by this latest attack, which leaves them at the mercy of unscrupulous employers who receive government

subsidies for taking them on.

Consequently, many more young people are applying for apprenticeships that pay only £90 per week—£2.50 an hour. Due to the overall lack of jobs, these miserly schemes, which provide little more than on-the-job training, are subject to intense competition for places.

Youth unemployment has reached 950,000 over the past few months, with 20.2 percent—one in five—of those between the ages of 16 and 24 unable to find work. Almost 100,000 of these have been unemployed for two years or more. Amongst school leavers, aged 16 and 17, almost half of job-seekers are without employment.

An estimated 220,000 are expected to fail to get a place at university due to the rush to get a place before the fees rise to £9,000 a year from next year. It is also anticipated that there will be even greater competition to get a place on A-level courses in further education as students who failed to make the grade this year seek to retake exams to improve their grades.

In addition to the cuts to council-run youth services, the Connexions service, which has provided careers advice over the last 11 years, has been slashed to the bone. Most major cities have cut and reorganised their provision to provide a minimum of advice. The Connexions service, which was both school- and area-based, provided a limited, although much-relied-upon support service to the most vulnerable sections of young people—and within that, some workers were solely responsible for NEETs.

From next year, local authorities cease to have a statutory duty to provide such advice. Instead, this will pass to schools that will receive no extra funding. Nationally, the only advice available will be online or over the telephone.

Charities and voluntary groups that also run a substantial part of youth services nationally are also being cut back. According to research carried out by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), which has not lifted a finger to oppose the cuts or defend young people, more than 380 children's and young people's charities have been the hardest hit by the cuts to charities overall, which have seen their funding cut by half. Some will lose their entire budgets.

Earlier this year, the Confederation of Heads of Young People's Services carried out a survey of 41 of its members across England. It found that youth

services have been disproportionately hit by government-imposed public spending cuts, with more than £100 million axed from local authority youth services by April of this year. Almost 3,000 full-time workers have been lost, and universal services such as youth clubs have been hit hardest. A full 96 percent of members who responded said club activities would be either reduced or stopped altogether by next April.

Brian Lightman, head of the Association of College and School Leaders, commented, "Sixteen-year-olds are facing unprecedented challenges at the moment as they hear a torrent of messages about the difficulty of accessing university places, increased tuition fees and youth unemployment.... As if all of this were not enough, messages are being sent out by government devaluing many of the qualifications these young people have worked hard to gain and turning them into a party political point-scoring competition. Politicians do this at their peril."



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