What the Milburn Report asks of the health system

Experts in health

The final report of the Milburn Review, *From a Welfare State to a Working State* (17 November), sets out a 10-year plan for the **nearly one million young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).** It puts the NHS at the centre, arguing that "participation has to become a core health outcome." Reducing NEET rates would become a **formal objective for every ICB**, built into the NHS Oversight Framework, and young people would get **health support through a new Youth Opportunity Service** (YOS) in every area, without waiting for a diagnosis.

Why is young people's health a target of change?

Ill health, especially disability and mental ill health, is a key driver of young people both becoming and continuing to be NEET.

28.4%
of all NEETs report disability or ill health as the primary reason for not being in education, training or employment.

18.3pp
growth since 2011 in the proportion of disabled NEETs citing mental health as their main health concern, up to 42.6% in 2025.

1 in 5
NEETs report having a mental health condition. This is mostly anxiety and depression rather than serious mental illnesses (prevalence 1.16% in adults in 2023).

80%
of young people who were NEET due to ill health in 2017-2019 were still NEET more than two years later.

How will NEET young people receive healthcare under the proposals?

Needs-based mental health care

Young people will access health care directly through the YOS; a diagnosis won't be needed to receive mental health support.

On Day 1 – regardless of diagnosis, the young person's YOS adviser can refer them to digital health support.

By Day 30 – a Participation Plan is drawn up, including health appointments.

By Day 90 – every YOS user in need of practical health support is guaranteed to be receiving it. This ranges across telephone counselling, AI-assisted talking therapies, and neurodevelopmental assessments.

From '*diagnose-wait-treat*' to '*predict-prevent-participate*'

- YOS non-clinical staff will advise users on managing health impairments.
- ICBs will commission more preventative services; YOSs will refer users there.
- Creation of at least one **Early Support Hub** per upper-tier local authority will enable earlier prevention, freeing up specialist CAMHS capacity.
- Services will be judged by their **youth participation outcomes**, not their activity level.

A new digital front door

- YOS users will be able to access **NHS Online**, the new national-scale digital health provider due to launch in 2027.
- Assessment and support for mental health and neurodevelopmental needs will be built into NHS Online.

CASE STUDY: Fit notes

Existing system: a GP can issue a fit note to sign a person off work long-term.

Proposed system, 2027 onwards: a GP can issue a short-term fit note. If a young person requests a long-term fit note from their GP, it triggers an automatic referral to the YOS. The young person will receive occupational health care through the YOS to return to work where possible.

How will the new models of care be governed under the proposals?

ICB accountability

- **ICBs** take on an explicit **responsibility for reducing health-related NEET rates**.
- The **ICB Chair** and **Mayoral Health Commissioner** roles would be combined in every area by 2029.
- **Health data** are shared between the ICB, YOS, and local government.

Quality metrics

- Quality assurance mechanisms and prices for ADHD and autism assessments are standardised across NHS and independent providers - **private providers will have funding restricted** if quality metrics are not met.
- **DHSC** will introduce **national maximum waiting times** for referral to CAMHS.

Financial and human resource flows

- **Mayoral Strategic Authorities** will receive **devolved funding** from central government. They will work with ICBs to jointly agree procurement of NEET-related health services.
- The new mental health model requires **4,500 staff**. Most will come from redeploying current staff, including up to **¼ of CAMHS staff** who will be freed up by the left shift in mental health care.
- Large NHS employers will guarantee interviews to NEETs, aiming for **10% of entry-level vacancies**.

Sources: Department for Work and Pensions, *From a Welfare State to a Working State: a new settlement for the next generation* (17 Nov 2026). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6afb1fc5ccb3ea58ac8743c1/from-a-welfare-state-to-a-working-state-full-report.pdf; Department for Work and Pensions, *Young people and work: interim report* (28 May 2026). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a3111dec39255c595b50928/Young_people_and_work_interim_report.pdf