

HOW FE COLLEGES CAN SUPPORT NEET LEARNERS

 gateway
qualifications



**HARLOW
COLLEGE**





How FE Colleges can support NEET learners

Gateway Qualifications, in partnership with Youth Employment UK, Milton Keynes College and Harlow College

As the number of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) continues to rise, further education (FE) colleges across the UK are playing an important role in offering these learners much needed support.

Gateway Qualifications, along with its partners, are at the forefront of delivering flexible and personalised qualifications that support NEET learners to re-engage with learning, develop essential skills, and move onto further study, apprenticeships or the workforce.

Nearly 900,000 young people in the UK are estimated to be NEET
(Not in Education, Employment, or Training) (Office for National Statistics (ONS), August 2024)

The growing NEET challenge

Recent figures show an alarming rise in the number of NEET young people, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This demographic faces a unique set of challenges, which prevents them from accessing mainstream further education or training opportunities once they've left school. Many NEET learners enter the system with low confidence, high anxiety, and a history of disengagement from traditional education settings.

Colleges are uniquely positioned to offer tailored support to this group of young people. By offering alternative pathways, flexible qualifications, and inclusive support, FE colleges can make a significant difference to the lives of NEET learners.

Gateway Qualifications provides the framework for this flexibility, allowing colleges to create programmes that meet both the needs of learners, and local employers.



Youth Employment UK: amplifying voices

Youth Employment UK: understanding and supporting NEET learners

Youth Employment UK plays an important role in supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET, or who have already slipped through the cracks of the education system, by helping to shape policy and practice based on the real experiences of young people.

Through their annual *Youth Voice Census*, they gather crucial insights into the barriers that prevent young people from engaging with education or employment.

The findings from the most recent Youth Voice Census reveal that many young people struggle with mental health challenges, with anxiety being a significant barrier for 43% of over 5,000 respondents.

This growing mental health crisis, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, has made it harder for young people to re-engage with learning or take steps towards employment.

Mental Health Crisis: 43% of young people report that anxiety is a major barrier to finding work or continuing their education (Youth Voice Census 24)

The research highlights the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, which is particularly challenging for disadvantaged young people.

Many NEET learners come from lower-income households, and financial pressures often prevent them from accessing further education, even when they want to. These young people are also more likely to have additional responsibilities, such as being carers themselves, which further limits their ability to engage fully with FE courses or vocational training.

Youth Employment UK focuses on ensuring that young people are given a voice in shaping the support and services they receive. They work closely with colleges and employers to ensure that young people's needs are considered when developing the curriculum, training, and associated support services.

By understanding the lived experiences, and real-world challenges these young people face, providers can create programmes that are practical and flexible, but also emotionally supportive, helping NEET learners to overcome multiple barriers.

Through its collaboration with Youth Employment UK, Gateway Qualifications will help to ensure that flexible qualifications are widely available.

These qualifications help learners build confidence, develop employability skills, and take steps towards re-engaging with education or entering the workforce.

Youth Employment UK continues to advocate for more tailored interventions that focus on the unique challenges faced by NEET learners, ensuring that education and training opportunities are truly accessible to all.



Milton Keynes College: Adapting to the needs of NEET learners

Challenges across the country

In Milton Keynes, and the Buckinghamshire area, the effects of COVID-19, rising mental health challenges, and increasing numbers of learners requiring Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) have significantly impacted the NEET population.

Too many young people are leaving school with few or no qualifications, and over half of those enrolling at Milton Keynes College declare some form of support need.

In fact, over 50% of learners in the NEET cohort declare a support need, with over 10% being high-need EHCP learners.

These patterns are, sadly, similarly repeated across England and Wales.

Impact: Retention Increase

The introduction of flexible pathways, including the Specialist Transition Pathway, has led to a 10% increase in retention rates at Milton Keynes College.

A personalised approach

To tackle these challenges, Milton Keynes College has introduced three new pathways at Level 1. These programmes focus on employability skills, English, and maths, allowing learners to explore a variety of vocational options while receiving the foundational support they need to progress. The college's *Specialist Transition Pathway* offers additional wraparound support for learners with significant SEND needs, ensuring they are prepared for college life both academically and emotionally.



Vocational Pathway

For learners wanting to take a vocational option/exploring future aspiration



Level 1 Certificate in Vocational Studies

Credits: 18 | Qualification No: 601/0024/2

Level 2 Certificate in Vocational Studies

Credits: 24 | Qualification No: 603/2542/2

Employability units could include:

- Conduct at Work
- Communication Skills for Work
- Career Planning

Vocational units could include:

- Beauty Unit
- Hair Unit
- Business Unit

Progression Pathway

For learners wanting to focus on English and Maths for progression



Entry Level Certificate in Progression (Entry 3)

Credits: 15 | Qual No: 600/8912/X

Level 1 Certificate in Progression

Credits: 21 | Qual No: 600/8915/5

Level 2 Certificate in Progression

Credits: 24 | Qual No: 600/8918/0

Units could include:

- Time Management [E3]
- Skills for Employability [E3]
- Improving Own Learning & Performance [L1]
- Personal Career Planning [L1]

Transition Pathway

For learners requiring additional support to transition to College/mainstream education



Entry Level Certificate in Progression (Entry 3)

Credits: 15 | Qual No: 600/8912/X

Level 1 Certificate in Progression

Credits: 21 | Qual No: 600/8915/5

Units could include:

- Making Choices [E3]
- Managing Social Relationships [E3]
- Healthy Living [L1]
- Negotiation Skills [L1]

By tailoring their programmes to meet the individual needs of learners, Milton Keynes College has increased retention by 10%. The ability to offer flexible learning pathways has been key to this success, and Gateway Qualifications has provided the necessary qualifications, and Centre support to allow learners to explore different vocational areas within the same course.

Future directions

Moving forward, Milton Keynes College plans to continue adapting its approach to NEET learners by offering even more flexibility in both curriculum and delivery. The college remains committed to ensuring that each learner has access to a programme that meets their individual needs and prepares them for further education or employment.

Addressing the needs of NEET learners

Harlow College has been a leader in supporting NEET learners through its 'Choices Programme'. Designed specifically for learners who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, the programme offers Gateway Qualification's entry level certificates and Level 1 progression diploma.

Learners are given the opportunity to build confidence, explore their strengths, and develop the skills necessary for further education or work.

Key Features

The 'Choices Programme' offers a unique, staggered start, where learners begin their term a week after the mainstream learner intake. This gives them the chance to settle into college life without feeling overwhelmed. And learners have the opportunity join a new Choices programme at three points within an academic year.

Learners are provided with iPads, ensuring they have access to technology and learning resources that enhance their learning experience, and are vital for current FE, and future workplace skills.

Impact: Success and growth

Since starting the Choices Programme last year, Harlow College has doubled its intake, and this year expects to reach over 100 learners.

Harlow College's emphasis on stability has been central to the programme's success. No new learners are added to the cohort mid-term, allowing learners to build strong relationships with their peers and lecturers, this reduces anxiety and promotes engagement.

Success stories

The *Choices Programme* has already made a significant impact. One learner, who initially struggled with anxiety and lacked confidence, is now thriving in a Level 3 gaming course thanks to the support provided through the programme. Many other learners have also progressed to higher-level courses or secured employment, demonstrating the programme's effectiveness.

Gateway Qualifications: flexible and learner-centric

Colleges like Milton Keynes and Harlow have chosen Gateway Qualifications because of its adaptable qualification frameworks, which allow learners to explore multiple vocational areas and choose the path that best suits their skills and interests.

At the heart of these initiatives is Gateway Qualifications' commitment to offering flexible, learner-centred qualifications. By offering flexible, high-quality qualifications that allow learners to explore different vocational areas, Gateway Qualifications helps colleges to meet the diverse needs of NEET learners.

Meeting learners where they are

The qualifications are expertly designed for adaptability, ensuring that each learner can find a pathway that suits their abilities, interests, and future ambitions.

This flexibility is key to re-engaging NEET learners and helping them take their first steps towards further education or employment.





The Path Ahead: A collaborative approach

Together, Gateway Qualifications, Youth Employment UK, Milton Keynes College and Harlow College are making a tangible difference in the lives of NEET learners. By offering flexible pathways, holistic support, and tailored qualifications, they are helping to ensure that every learner has the opportunity to succeed.

If, as expected the NEET population continues to grow, it will be more important than ever for colleges to offer flexible, responsive educational programmes that meet the needs of these learners.



Together, Gateway Qualifications and its partners are helping to pave the way for a brighter future.

For more information on how Gateway Qualifications can support your college, and your learners, contact us at:



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