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Tender

Social Mobility Commission - Qualitative research understanding the experiences of NEETs in Blackpool

Social Mobility Commission

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Scope

Reference

SMC-2526-100

Description

The Social Mobility Commission is interested in conducting research to understand the lived experiences of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), the factors that lead to them becoming and remaining NEET, and the barriers to effective support. Our motivation stems from wanting to understand how and why risk factors interact, and understanding the interaction between structural and individual factors areas of concern. This also aligns with the Social Mobility Commission's place-based and local-insight led approach because a one-size-fits-all national policy towards social mobility does not consider specific regional barriers or issues.

Existing quantitative research offers a robust understanding of the scale, trends, and key

risk factors for NEETs, but it highlights a growing and evolving challenge. The scale is significant. As of September 2025, an estimated 946,000 16-24 year-olds in the UK are NEET, representing 12.7% of this age group and a notable rise since 2021. The growth is being primarily driven by a shift towards economic inactivity, often due to sickness or disability, which now accounts for roughly three in five NEETs. Crucially, national trends mask considerable local variation, with high-risk areas such as the North East England (15%) and Blackpool, underscoring the need for a place-based approach to research.

Blackpool, in particular stands out as an acute example of this place-based challenge due to the high intensity and confluence of social mobility barriers that amplify the risk of young people becoming NEET. Its weak local labour market, reliant on a seasonal service sector, is evidenced by high economic inactivity (28.4% for 16-64 year olds) and high unemployment-related benefit claims. This is compounded by significant underlying risk factors: the NEET rate for 16-17 year-olds is estimated at 8.9% (compared to the English rate of 5.6%), educational attainment is low (GCSE Attainment 8 score of 34.8% vs. national 46.1%), a high proportion of disabled residents and unpaid carers, and it has nearly three times the national average of looked after children. These intersecting, compounding factors make it an area which the Commission wants to initially focus on for in-depth, place-based research.

Beyond geography, the NEET population is diverse, but disproportionately represented by certain characteristics, including older NEETs (18-24 year olds), young people with disabilities (29% NEET rate), and those with low educational qualifications. Indeed, research has underlined that risk factors are often interrelated and compounding, meaning factors like low qualifications, disability, and socioeconomic background significantly increase the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET.

However, there are key gaps in the research:

- There is a need for qualitative research to explore the subjective lived experiences of being NEET, particularly how complex, co-occurring, and compounding factors (e.g. education, local labour market, family background, mental and physical health) contribute at the individual and local level.
- Existing qualitative work is often limited by a conceptual or individualistic focus (e.g., self-perception or self-determination) and has not adequately applied a social mobility lens. This leaves a critical gap in understanding the interaction between individual circumstances and broader structural factors.
- Some significant sub-groups, such as older NEETs (18-24), young men, and disabled individuals, remain understudied.
- Research needs to provide rich contextual insights between different high-risk areas and offer a more in-depth consideration of the impact of regional/local labour markets (e.g. in

Blackpool or North East England).

- There is limited understanding of effective protective factors, social support, and structural systems.
- There is a lack of co-produced, participatory research with NEET young people.

Combined with this, the policy context surrounding NEETs offers an opportunity for the research to contribute meaningfully to wider discussions on the topic. These include, the Get Britain Working White Paper, the launch of national Trailblazer schemes, the Millburn Review into youth inactivity all makes this a pertinent time to build understanding of lived experiences of NEET young people, and inform interventions.

Please find attached the full tender document, which outlines more details and the procurement schedule.

An electronic copy of your tender must be submitted to contact@socialmobilitycommission.gov.uk no later than 4pm on 26 January 2026. Late tenders will not be considered.

Total value (estimated)

- £80,000 excluding VAT
- £96,000 including VAT

Below the relevant threshold

Contract dates (estimated)

- 9 February 2026 to 31 August 2026
- Possible extension to 26 February 2027
- 1 year, 18 days

Description of possible extension:

A potential 6-month extension will be permitted, but only in negotiations with the winning supplier and only for time, not additional costs.

Main procurement category

Services

CPV classifications

- 79315000 - Social research services

Contract locations

- UK - United Kingdom

Participation

This procurement is reserved for

UK suppliers

Particular suitability

- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)
 - Voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSE)
-

Submission

Enquiry deadline

19 January 2026, 4:00pm

Tender submission deadline

26 January 2026, 4:00pm

Submission address and any special instructions

Bidders must submit their Bids before 4pm on 26 January 2026. All Bids must be submitted to contact@socialmobilitycommission.gov.uk.

Failure to return Bids by the time and due date or in the required format may disqualify Bidders from consideration.

Tenderers should present their proposals in the following format:

- Section 1 Summary of Proposal
- Section 2 Meeting the Specification:

Details of proposed approach;

Methodology including constraints and possible solutions;

Project management - Tenderers should indicate how they will monitor the project to ensure it is delivered in terms of quality, timeliness and cost. Tenders must include a work plan/Gantt chart that clearly shows the key activities and milestones leading up to the final report. It should mirror the detail on the budget template.

Staffing, including short staff profiles covering examples of key relevant experience, including demonstrating experience of the team doing relevant work, specifically in conducting successful interviews with potentially vulnerable young people and individual/staff expertise and qualifications. Proposed distribution of duties should be clearly stated if the bid involves sub-contracting or collaboration between different

providers; and

Outputs, including how the findings will be presented.

- Section 3 Cost and Charging Arrangements

Costs should be shown separately by methodology and/or deliverable. For example:

Semi-structured interviews : £ Insert amount

In-person focus groups: £ Insert amount (if included)

Project management: £ Insert amount

Final report ready publication: £ Insert amount

Total: £ Insert amount

All costs should be quoted exclusive of VAT but please indicate if the project will attract VAT. If your proposal includes costs for sub-contractors these costs must be shown inclusive of any VAT element (e.g. sub-contractor's costs to you are £10K plus VAT, your proposal should show subcontractors costs as £12K inclusive of VAT @ 20%).

The department will also conduct its own due diligence checks in relation to the bidder's financial viability and may request additional financial information to be provided as part of this process. Whilst the department will attempt to mitigate any financial risks it may, at its own discretion, reject a bid where it assesses the financial risk to be too great to proceed with the award of the contract.

- Section 4 Risk Management

Outline, in no more than one-page, the key risks to delivering the project and what contingencies will be put in place to deal with them.

A risk is any factor that may delay, disrupt or prevent the full achievement of a project objective. All risks should be identified.

For each risk, the one-page summary should assess its likelihood (high, medium or low) and specify its possible impact on the project objectives (again rated high, medium or low). The assessment should also identify appropriate actions that would reduce or eliminate each risk or its impact.

Typical areas of risk for a research project might include staffing, resource constraints, technical constraints, recruitment constraints, data access, timing, management and

operational issues, but this is not an exhaustive list.

- Section 5 Data Security and safeguarding

Provide a plan that explains how departmental and/or personal data will be protected.

Provide a plan on how safeguarding and ethics will be carried out.

- Section 7 References

Sections 1 - 4 should not exceed 10 sides of A4 and sections 5 - 6 should not exceed 3 sides of A4, for a combined total of 13 sides. Any bids above that will not be considered. The font size should not be smaller than 10. Embedded links will not be considered, nor will Annexes that exceed the 13-page count.

Tenders may be submitted electronically

No

Award criteria

Name	Description	Type	Weighting
Financial scoring	Financial scoring represents 20% of the overall evaluation. The bidder with the cheapest overall price will receive 20 marks and all other bids will be marked as a proportional variance from the top scoring bid. The formula being used for Relative Assessment for this procurement is: Bid Score = (Lowest Price/bid price) x 20 E.g. a bid that is 10% more expensive will receive 18 marks; one that is twice the price will receive 10 marks	Cost	20%
Does the proposal describe a robust method / suitable approach	- Demonstrates a clear understanding of the objectives and approaches outlined - Creative and constructive thinking demonstrated by the proposed approach to this project in meeting the objectives - The suitability of the proposed approach to deliver against requirements, and identification of any opportunities to add value to this	Quality	20%

Name	Description	Type	Weighting
Team and organisational experience in conducting similar work	- Demonstrate experience of the team doing relevant work, specifically in conducting successful interviews with potentially vulnerable young people - Evidence of experience in the challenges and considerations involved in this work - How the skills and experience of the team will be used and managed to best effect (where there is a partnership please include specific about how this will be managed, add value and any experience of successful collaboration) - Specifics about the methodology and quality assurance process - Specifics about ethical and safeguarding processes	Quality	20%

Name	Description	Type	Weighting
Presentation	- Clear articulation of plans for presenting work in clear and eye-catching ways - - Evidence of ability to deliver high quality research, fieldwork and outputs - - Ability to present findings clearly in both writing and visual formats (e.g. PowerPoints tailored to a range of audiences - analysts, commissioners, wider secretariat)	Quality	16%
Project management	- Clear plan for communication and demonstration of a collaborative approach to taking the work forward, working closely with SMC as appropriate. - - Evidence of organisational capacity, project management and quality assurance procedures, to deliver the project in the specified timescales and quality - - The quality, timing and suitability of proposed outputs	Quality	16%
Risks and mitigations and data protection	- That the risks and challenges are considered and mitigation integrated into the proposed methodology - - Consideration of security, confidentiality and data protection	Quality	8%

Procedure

Procedure type

Below threshold - open competition

Contracting authority

Social Mobility Commission

- Public Procurement Organisation Number: PDLB-8544-PLQT

1 Horse Guards Road

London

SW1A 2HQ

United Kingdom

Email: contact@socialmobilitycommission.gov.uk

Region: UKI32 - Westminster

Organisation type: Public authority - central government