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Planning

Social Mobility Commission - Qualitative research understanding the experiences of young people who are NEET

Social Mobility Commission

UK2: Preliminary market engagement notice - Procurement Act 2023 - [view information about notice types](#)

Notice identifier: 2025/S 000-080395

Procurement identifier (OCID): ocds-h6vhtk-05f045

Published 7 December 2025, 8:54pm

Scope

Reference

SMC-2526-100

Description

The Social Mobility Commission (SMC) monitors progress towards improving social mobility in the UK and promotes social mobility in England. It is an independent statutory body created by an Act of Parliament.

The SMC is conducting qualitative 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. This project aims to address key gaps in existing research, particularly the need for qualitative understanding of how complex, co-occurring, and compounding factors contribute to being NEET, and to examine this issue through a social mobility lens.

The approach will be qualitative and phased, including a pilot in Blackpool with the potential to roll-out to two other high-NEET areas in North East England and the West Midlands (to be determined with the SMC).

The supplier is required to deliver the Blackpool Pilot phase, which includes:

- Carrying out semi-structured interviews with young people who are NEET in Blackpool with the aim of understanding young people's lived experiences of becoming NEET, their daily lives, and how support could be improved.
- Carrying out one or two follow-up focus groups to consider what NEET young people think would help their return to education, employment or training.
- Utilising a sampling approach that aims for diversity across key characteristics such as age, race, sex, and disability status.
- Recruiting participants through local stakeholders such as the Blackpool Trailblazer, or other methods..
- Ensuring the research uses local youth forums to support development of interview questions and validate findings
- Ensure that the pilot methodology established is robust for potential roll-out to other areas.
- Using quantitative insights from relevant official and reliable data sources, ideally accessed at the local level to help contextualise the findings.

The budget for this pilot is between £ 50k to 80k excluding VAT (to be confirmed).

Following the Pilot, the supplier will be required to replicate the study in two other geographical areas. Potentially in the North East England and West Midlands Combined Authority trailblazers.

Objectives and Deliverables

Pilot study:

- Submitting research plan and ethical proposal by March 2026
- Fieldwork completed by June 2026
- Final report by August 2026

Subsequent research locations:

- Timelines to be agreed, with final report delivery by August 2027.

About our organisation

The Social Mobility Commission exists to create a United Kingdom where the circumstances of birth do not determine outcomes in life.

It is responsible for:

- Publishing an annual report setting out our views on the progress made towards improving social mobility in the United Kingdom.
- Promoting social mobility in England, for example, by supporting employers, the professions, universities and schools to play their part in promoting social mobility.
- Carrying out and publishing research in relation to social mobility.
- Providing advice to ministers (at their request) on how to improve social mobility in England - this advice must then be published.

The strategic objectives of the SMC are

- To change the debate on social mobility.
- To provide independent advice to policy and decision makers cross-sector, so they understand how to consider socio-economic disadvantage as part of their work.
- To catalyse meaningful and measurable action by local and national government that can improve outcomes for all.

Total value (estimated)

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

Below the relevant threshold

Contract dates (estimated)

- 1 February 2026 to 31 August 2026
- Possible extension to 31 August 2027
- 1 year, 7 months

Main procurement category

Services

CPV classifications

- 79315000 - Social research services

Contract locations

- UK - United Kingdom

Engagement

Engagement deadline

23 December 2025

Engagement process description

This is a pre-market warming exercise. The SMC is engaging with suppliers who have expertise in conducting qualitative research with young people to discuss and test the preliminary thoughts for this research proposal and establish a robust methodology for the

Blackpool Pilot.

The engagement period is from 08/12/2025 to 23/12/2025.

Engagement can take the form of:

- Phone calls with prospective suppliers.
- Supplier meetings.

We are seeking expressions of interest and clarification on the feasibility of the proposed research, particularly regarding the challenging timeline and the delivery of a robust methodology. Please submit any comments or expressions of interest to contact@socialmobilitycommission.gov.uk by 5 pm on 23/12/2025.

Any clarification questions should be sent to contact@socialmobilitycommission.gov.uk by 5 pm 19/12/2025.

Participation

Particular suitability

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

Submission

Publication date of tender notice (estimated)

5 January 2026

Contracting authority

Social Mobility Commission

- Public Procurement Organisation Number: PDLB-8544-PLQT

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Organisation type: Public authority - central government