



# Ending the NEET crisis for good

A blueprint for the next Prime Minister

Analysis provided by  
Social Market Foundation

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8th May 2015

The Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister

Congratulations on a hard-fought campaign! No doubt you will have more fights on your hands over the coming years – but also some great opportunities. None will be greater and more urgent than ending youth unemployment in the UK once and for all.

You will know that the number of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) have remained stubbornly high throughout the boom and bust of the 2000s, and well into the current recovery there are still nearly one million NEET young people in the UK. We need structural solutions to the structural problem of one in five young people failing to make the transition from school to work.

We know you care about this issue – but you are currently prevented from making an effective impact because responsibility is divided between Ministers and Departments, with no one truly accountable, or with the power to effect the necessary changes.

We are therefore asking you to appoint – for one term only – a **Secretary of State to Make NEETs History** and to chair a new Cabinet Committee to drive the programme through successfully.

Working with the Social Market Foundation, we have prepared a blueprint outlining an action plan for the new Secretary of State. It sets out the four crucial policy areas which will make the most difference over the next five years with the goal of totally eliminating the structural barriers to youth employment by 2020.

The success of the 2012 Summer Olympics is just one recent example that illustrates what we can achieve when we cut across Whitehall turf wars and departmental silos.

Ensuring all young people in our country make the transition from school to work would be an unparalleled legacy, as would the elimination of the estimated £22 billion our country spends every year on youth unemployment.

We urge you to seize this opportunity to end the NEET crisis for good by appointing a Secretary of State and implementing this blueprint for action. The future of our youth and the labour market is in your hands.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daniela Barone Soares".

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# 8th MAY 2015

## MINUTE TO THE PRIME MINISTER

### CABINET APPOINTMENTS – SECRETARY OF STATE TO MAKE NEETS HISTORY

#### SUMMARY

##### Issue

1. We have an opportunity to solve a problem that has persisted for over a decade – the large number of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs), and likely to remain so. Previous attempts to tackle this problem have been stymied in part by the fact that responsibility for tackling the issue is split between government departments.

##### Timeframe for implementation

2. Immediate – following 2015 General Election. If Cabinet appointments are made merely on current departmental lines, then the split responsibilities will remain, making it impossible to succeed against ambitious targets such as David Cameron's pledge to 'abolish youth unemployment', Ed Miliband's promise to the 'forgotten 50%', or Nick Clegg's commitment for every young person to 'share in the recovery'. The start of the new Parliament is a major opportunity to adopt a new direction and create accountability for solving this problem.

##### Recommendation

3. That you appoint a Secretary of State to Make NEETs History who will create and publish a five-year strategy and set of targets, to be updated annually with the goal of making NEETs history by the end of this Parliament.
4. A review of policy in this area suggests long-term reform is needed within the provision and funding of further education, the responsibilities of local authorities and the purposes of pre-16 education. However, solving the UK's NEET crisis is an urgent priority and **we recommend an achievable and immediate strategy of action across four areas, which can have tangible results.**

#### Vision

5. Following this strategy, we believe that a significant reduction in the number of young people NEET is achievable by an empowered Secretary of State by the end of this Parliament. Our vision is that by 2020:
  - Every school in England and Wales will be responsible for the post-16 destinations of their pupils and that they will be properly resourced to help ensure every pupil is supported to a destination in education, training or employment.
  - Further education providers will have significantly improved the rates of learners achieving the qualifications that will help them in the workplace. Two-thirds of all government-funded apprenticeships will be reserved for those aged under 25.
  - Every Jobcentre Plus (JCP) in England and Wales will employ specialist youth advisers, helping young people navigate and secure the traineeships, apprenticeships, and skills training they need to eventually find secure employment.
  - Every local authority will be intentionally using its convening power to bring together partnerships of schools and colleges, employers, and the voluntary sector to develop strategies, and deliver programmes, which suit local labour markets, and result in local reductions in numbers of young people NEET.
6. A report should be laid annually before Parliament by the Secretary of State, setting out progress against targets and progress towards each element of the strategy.



## 1.

# The case for action

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7. The proportion of young people who are NEET is stubbornly high. The latest data (April-June 2014) shows 8% of 16-18 year olds and 16% of 19-24 year olds were NEET. This corresponds to nearly a million young people. These figures compare poorly to the overall unemployment rate of 6.4%. There are also grounds to suggest the official NEET figures significantly under-record the true numbers.
8. While UK unemployment now compares well to other developed economies for older workers, youth unemployment is well above many of our peers. The latest comparable data from the OECD (Q3 2013) suggests, for example, that the unemployment rate among older workers (aged 25 and over) in Germany is 5% compared to 5.4% in the UK. However, when we look at younger workers the unemployment rate in Germany is 7.9%, whereas in the UK it is two-and-a-half times as high at 20.7%. These are the people that we are letting down at the moment.
9. The long-term effects of just six months spent NEET between 16 and 24 are well-attested. They include wage scarring over a 20-year period of up to 11%, as well as reduced job security, when compared to a worker with low qualifications but who has not been NEET. In addition, NEETs experience an increased risk of teenage pregnancy, youth offending, homelessness and mental and physical health problems. Estimates of the total annual cost of the NEET problem are frequently put at around £22 billion, in terms of additional public spending.
10. Recent figures suggest that we should not feel defeated by the issue. Even in these early stages of the economic recovery, the proportion of NEETs in 2014 is down on 2013, which itself was already an improvement on 2012. However, it should be noted that the numbers of young people NEET have not changed significantly since numbers were first collected in 2000. This is a structural issue, and not one tied to economic cycles. It requires structural solutions. Government can make significant progress but not while responsibility for these solutions is divided.

### Where responsibility is divided

11. The two major dividing lines are age and employment status. The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for policy and funding for young people while they have to be in full-time education (this used to be until 16, but is rising to 18 in 2015). Responsibility then passes to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) if the person is in work or training and to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) if the person is not.
12. While there are some arrangements for joint working, crucially no department is responsible for the transition between education and employment. The fundamental purpose of creating a Secretary of State to Make NEETs History would be to unify responsibility for this transition for all students, with a particular focus on those currently not making the transition – those who end up NEET.
13. This does not require any changes in the machinery of government, especially not the creation of a new department. The purpose of the new role is to put the school-to-work transition at the heart of a new strategy and focus quickly on what works in preventing young people ending up NEET rather than get tied up in institutional change.
14. Previous efforts to promote coordination have stopped short of this proposal. Since before 2010, there has been a joint apprenticeships unit working across DfE and BIS. More recently, John Hayes, Matt Hancock and now Nick Boles have been in a joint, if junior, ministerial role. However, these arrangements have not included DWP; and there has been no overarching strategy or target that the Minister is expected to deliver.

### What we know about transitions

15. An initial study by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families compared what young people were doing in May 2007 when they were 16-17 to where they had ended

up a year later, when they were 17-18 (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Transitions in main activities from age 16-17 to 17-18**

		Activity at 17-18 (rows sum to 100%)					
		Weighted base	Full-time education	Job with training	Job without training	Government-supported training	NEET
Activity at 16-17	Full-time education	12,444	81	5	8	3	4
	Job with training	1,310	12	29	30	22	7
	Job without training	776	12	27	40	10	12
	Government-supported training	811	11	16	13	49	10
	NEET	1,307	16	10	22	8	44

Source: LSYPE Wave 5 and YCS Cohort, Sweep 2

16. Whilst only 4% of those who were in full-time education at 16 went on to become NEET at 17, a worrying 44% of all people who were NEET at 16 were also NEET at 17. A later study by DfE found that this pattern continued for 19-year-olds. In other words, the transition from the stage when compulsory education comes to an end – at the time of this research, age 16 – has huge importance. Fifty-six per cent of young people who were in education at age 16 were still in education at age 19, yet almost half of those NEET at age 16 were also NEET at age 19.
17. More recently, in December 2013, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research completed a longitudinal study based on the British Household Panel Survey, a nationally representative annual survey of 16- to 25-year-olds that ran from 1991 until 2008. The study reports on young people's transitions between four states: employment, unemployment, education and a residual category made up of a person who is neither studying nor working, which is referred to as NEA (Neither in Education nor Active). Together, the unemployed and NEA groups represent what is more commonly known as NEET.



18. The transitions between states are summarised in Table 2. Of the 3,452 instances of a young person moving out of education in the sample, less than two-thirds ended in employment during the period studied. Twenty-five per cent of those moving out of education were unemployed and, in all, 35% were what we would describe as NEET. By contrast, even those who were unemployed had a better chance of finding a job, perhaps reflecting the fact that they had previously had some labour market experience as compared to those straight out of education who had none.

**Table 2: Transitions between states**

		Destination:				
		Employment	Unemployment	NEA	Education	Total
Origin:	Employment	-	1,241	340	659	2,240
	Unemployment	1,553	-	172	217	1,942
	NEA	320	132	-	193	645
	Education	2,231	885	336	-	3,452
	Total	4,104	2,258	848	1,069	8,279

**Source: NIESR, British Household Panel Survey, December 2013**

19. While the studies described have not yet been updated to look at the impact of raising the participation age, it is likely that all raising the age will do is delay the point at which successful or unsuccessful transitions occur, without changing the pattern or incidence of unsuccessful transitions. As well as extending the educational experience by raising the participation age, there remains a strong imperative for Government to focus on the quality of this extended experience and the transition to employment.

## 2.

# The programme

20. Our advice is for the new Secretary of State to develop a strategy based on the following four areas:

- **Improving school-to-work transitions:** young people are most vulnerable to becoming NEET when they leave school. Despite attempts to simplify vocational pathways, they remain complex and misunderstood by employers and students. Schools typically do not have a senior leader responsible for pupil transitions, and there is evidence that young people not pursuing an academic track miss out on a clear plan for progression. At the same time, the provision and quality of careers education is patchy, and there is little clear responsibility for this. Finally, schools' funding is in no way linked to whether pupils reach positive destinations.
- **Focusing on higher-quality further education and apprenticeships:** young people who go into further education or apprenticeships are experiencing lower-quality provision than those who go into higher education, with predictable effects on attainment. Public funding continues to prop up poor-quality provision. This money can be refocused on further education and apprenticeships provision that works.
- **Tailoring job-search services for young people:** the all-age Jobcentre Plus (JCP) offer does not work for younger people and there is evidence that it is particularly ineffective for those young people furthest from the labour market. There is an emerging and well-supported case for a service which is better directed towards their needs.
- **Incentivising local authorities to make an impact:** there are large variations across local authorities in the proportions of young people who are NEET. While these are inevitably due in some part to different economic conditions, activist local authorities can have an impact and more can be encouraged to play that role.

These elements are the basis for a strategy to make NEETs history. To measure progress towards that target, the

strategy should set a one-year and five-year aspiration for the proportion of NEETs. The NEET rate for 19- to 24-year-olds over the last year has improved from 18.3% to 16%. Sharpening that trajectory to get to 12% may be a sensible aspiration for a two-year target and the five-year target would effectively be to provide a jobs, education or training guarantee for young people. There will always be some young people who are NEET at any given point due to time spent looking for work or suitable education or training. Hence the aim would be to reach a NEET rate of zero when measured over a three- or six-month period. Further analysis will be needed to get this definition right.

### Improving school-to-work transitions

21. The critical importance of the transition from school-to-work means that an obvious starting point for a new strategy is improving the focus in schools on destinations. Particularly for those young people not heading for university, their post-16 options are complex and contingent on their results at 16. Schools must provide a better map for young people at 16, and further education colleges must ensure that their provision equips young people for employment.

In the Adonis Growth Review – completed recently by former Labour Party Education Minister Lord Adonis in 2014 – he recommends that every secondary school should employ a Director of Enterprise and Employment, to be supported by adequate staff and budget. We would recommend a similar approach for every secondary school, and specify that this senior staff member be responsible for:

- Commissioning the school's career advice and guidance, and working with other senior leaders to link careers and employability with curriculum learning.
- Ensuring every pupil has at least five experiences of work or enterprise by the time they complete their GCSEs or equivalent.

- Ensuring every pupil at 16 has an individual progression plan which sets out their post-16 educational and work experience needs, and their predicted route to their first full-time employment.
  - Building up a network of connections with local employers from all sectors who may provide future work experience and employment for pupils.
22. To complement the work of the Director of Enterprise and Employment, we recommend every school should have an 'Employment Governor', responsible for connecting the school to the local labour market and facilitating high-quality interaction with local employers.
23. To monitor the effectiveness of these Directors, and of individual schools in securing good transitions for their pupils, it is imperative that schools accurately collect and use data on the destinations of pupils. Ofsted has indicated willingness to inspect schools' performance in this area and this should be implemented across all inspections. Holding schools accountable, through DfE returns and Ofsted inspections, for both accurate reporting on pupil destinations and for the proportion of pupils making a successful school-to-work transition would sharpen the focus of schools that are not doing well and allow schools that are excelling to benefit from that.
24. The responsibility for careers advice has already been devolved to individual schools and so the cost of these changes is small in the context of overall school budgets. Schools below a certain size could be permitted to share a Director with another school in the locality to manage the cost impact.
25. Young people who are eligible for Free School Meals (and thus for the Pupil Premium) are significantly more likely than the general population to fail to achieve 5 GCSEs A\*-C, including Maths and English. This is a key predictor of spending some time NEET

between 16 and 24, with 34% of young people NEET having been eligible for Free School Meals, despite making up only 25% of the school population.

26. Currently provisioned at £2.5 billion for this budget year, the Pupil Premium now represents a significant amount of targeted money in the system. Ofsted pays attention to how schools spend their Pupil Premium funding, and inspection reports can now include commentary on the attainment and progress of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium, and how this compares to other pupils. Attainment at GCSE-level of these pupils is a key measure of how successfully a school allocates and manages its Pupil Premium funding. We recommend that every school inspection should report on the school's attainment gap at 16, and the way in which the Pupil Premium is spent and managed.
27. The strong link between Free School Meal status, GCSE attainment and time spent NEET leads us to recommend that the Secretary of State be responsible for oversight to ensure that the Pupil Premium for young people aged 14-16 is spent effectively to achieve the purposes for which it is designed. They should be required to report annually to Parliament on:
- progress towards closing the attainment gap
  - destinations for those who do not achieve five A\*-C GCSEs (including English and Maths)
  - lessons drawn from those schools which are making positive progress
  - specific observations, based on data and recommendations, in relation to the efficacy of the Pupil Premium.



### Focusing on higher-quality further education and apprenticeships

28. The majority of young people do not go to university. Post-16, the majority pursue courses which are largely, or entirely, vocational. But the quality of what they receive is highly variable, with 41% of further education providers judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted. A BIS study reveals that more than 90% of the students at some training providers go on to employment or further training, whereas that is the case for less than half of the students at others, demonstrating high levels of variability in quality. There are also providers who are unable to evidence their pupils' employment outcomes, which makes it even harder for young people to understand their options.
29. These are worrying findings from provision funded by public money, and raises questions over the impact and focus of the particularly large cuts experienced in post-16 education since 2010. The quality of further education has also received far less scrutiny than pre-16 education.
30. A new accountability system for school sixth forms and colleges is due to come into force in 2016. These institutions will be obliged to track and clearly report on key indicators of their performance at pupil-level. This is entirely welcome, but by itself will not be enough to narrow the gap in college performance.
31. The presence in the market of providers who do achieve high proportions of positive destinations for their students suggests that a reform strategy could proceed by over time increasing their share of public funding and reducing the funding available to those with poor results or results that they are unable to report. This would reward the better providers and provide strong incentives for others to improve. This change does not require new funding; it is about how planned funding is allocated.
32. There is a particular issue over making sure that, through further education, all young people achieve a Level 2 qualification in English and Maths (equivalent to a 'C' at GCSEs). This qualification has been repeatedly shown to be of significant value in the labour market, as well as an essential pre-requisite to Level 3 vocational qualifications. Of those who turned 19 in

2013 and had not achieved A\*-C GCSE grades in English and Maths at 16, fewer than 10% had achieved it by 19. This is a stark failure for further education and providers who are unable to improve these figures should have their funding placed at threat.

33. Apprenticeships present a different challenge. Numbers are rising, and ambitious targets for more are promised by all major parties, but the proportion going to younger people is falling. Forty-five per cent of those starting apprenticeships in 2012/13 were aged over 25, compared to only 18% in 2009/10. In many cases the public funding for apprenticeships is effectively being used by employers to train their existing workforce rather than to provide new training or employment opportunities to young people.
34. Reorientating the apprenticeship programme – setting a target that two-thirds of apprenticeships be reserved for under-25s and that half should represent new jobs – will provide much better value for money, avoid the deadweight costs of employers using the programme to train existing staff and take a step toward making NEETs history.
35. It is also crucial that the additional apprenticeships proportionately come from high-skills sectors, and that the majority are at Level 3 or above. The Secretary of State needs to be accountable for achieving these changes and will need to work closely with the Skills Funding Council, the Association of Education and Learning Providers and Sector Skills Councils to bring them about. There is great political salience in significantly boosting the number of apprenticeships, but concerns that young people are missing out and that the quality of some apprenticeships is poor, are deepening. We recommend the Secretary of State prioritise getting the qualification level, sector mix, and take-up by young people right, alongside growing the programme overall.
36. Within that overall ambition, the Secretary of State will also have to consider the pathway into an apprenticeship. Some young people, especially those who are at high risk of becoming NEET or may be NEET already, will not be ready

to go straight into a high-quality apprenticeship programme. Traineeships are a key pre-apprenticeship programme; and the Coalition has been seeking to expand these. Further increases are likely to be necessary. For some young people who do not get their Level 2 qualifications in English and Maths by 16, the most effective route to studying for that qualification will be in a work-based setting and all traineeships should provide the qualification, as well as the work-readiness skills needed for moving on to an apprenticeship.

37. These changes – reorientating the apprenticeship programme to improve the take-up by young people, preparing them for the challenge of an apprenticeship through a traineeship and a new focus on higher-level apprenticeships – will increase the ‘per unit’ cost of apprenticeships. All the political parties have committed additional funding for apprenticeships already and our recommendation would be to look closely at allocating that additional funding between growth in numbers and in improvements, such as those recommended here. If growth is managed at a more realistic pace, then there should be sufficient funding available to improve quality and take-up by young people as well.

### **Tailoring job-search services for young people**

38. All parties have recognised that JCP needs improving in how it deals with young people. Labour have called for out-of-work benefits to be replaced by a Youth Allowance, dependent on a young person being in training. The Coalition have announced a new pilot scheme, offering specialist advice and support to 16-17 year olds. Youth advisers will be on hand to provide individuals with information about their options, such as apprenticeships and traineeships, and will also assist with job applications. If young people do not have English and Maths qualifications they will be sent on the appropriate training and, if by six months they are still out of work or inactive, then their youth adviser will be responsible for setting up a work placement.

39. These pilots will have been running for 15,000 young

people across the UK in selected job centres since Autumn 2014. Depending on the results, the youth adviser model could be rolled out across the country. There is plentiful anecdotal evidence that young people view JCP with great suspicion, and the service will have to be well-resourced and high-quality to overcome this.

40. The Conservative Party announced a plan in October 2014 to send JCP coaches into schools to work with 15-year-olds most at risk of becoming NEET. If the Secretary of State proceeds with this plan, we strongly recommend that these coaches be (a) accountable to the Director of Enterprise and Employment in each school, and (b) follow emerging good practice in this area. The similar ThinkForward programme, set up by Impetus-PEF and delivered by Tomorrow’s People in east London, has resulted in four out of five participating schools – which had some of the most ‘at risk’ pupils in the UK – recording NEET rates of below one per cent for their Year 11 school leavers. The programme includes one-to-one support to identify post-16 choices, complete application forms and set up mentoring and work placements. The support offered is long-term, expert and remains available until the young person is 19. Clearly such intensive support is not required for the mainstream, but if we are to help those on course to become NEET, a light-touch intervention delivered by people without the necessary competence, will be a waste of funding.

### **Encouraging local authorities to make an impact**

41. Youth unemployment data shows that there is wide variation by local authority area in the proportions of young people who become NEET. For example, the latest figures show that in Surrey only 1.8% of young people are NEET, while that figure rises to 9.8% in Newcastle.
42. Differences in local economic performance likely shape much of this variation. But that is by no means universally true and it seems that some local authorities with high numbers of NEETs are very focused on tackling the issue compared to others.
43. For example, Camden has seen a decrease in the rate of

NEETs from 10.2% in 2012 to 5.7% in 2013. This followed an initiative by Camden City Council to establish the Camden Partnership for Educational Excellence, working with schools and colleges in the area, parents and businesses. The council sought no new powers to enact this programme and instead allocated £2 million from its existing budget to support projects which encouraged work-related learning, volunteering and mentoring. There was also additional and targeted support for GCSE/Level 2 students on the borderline of success to ensure they got their qualification and then had advice and guidance about apprenticeships or Level 3 study.

44. There is no one right way for local authorities to use their soft power to decrease youth employment, and we do not recommend the Secretary of State mandate a particular model. But a clear common feature of countries with lower youth unemployment rates is 'collective action' on the issue, bringing together employers (perhaps through local enterprise partnerships), education institutions and local statutory bodies. To encourage more local authorities to take an activist approach, we recommend the Secretary of State begin to 'call in' local authorities with high proportions of NEETs and offer advice and assistance from his or her team to develop local programmes along the lines of previously successful models and to engage relevant local partners.
45. Some local authorities, and the Local Government Association, have previously called for more control over employment programmes, such as the Work Programme and Youth Contract, which are operated at national level. We recommend that the Secretary of State lead a pilot by which those motivated local authorities willing to dedicate resources to coordinating employment programmes at local level are permitted to do so and provided with the relevant funding to make this happen. A small fund of £5 million – to match the amount of money put up by local authorities – would be sufficient to create five pilots on the scale of the programme run by Camden.

# 3.

# Overcoming the barriers

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46. The most significant challenge for the Secretary of State may be at Whitehall-level, should Ministers and officials at the departments currently sharing responsibility prove reluctant to relinquish their 'turf'. To mitigate this risk, we recommend that you, as Prime Minister, establish and chair a Cabinet Committee for Youth Unemployment, attended by the new Secretary of State, and those at DfE, DWP and BIS. This would be a time-limited, but extremely effective, way of signalling your personal commitment to the issue, and establishing it as a priority across Government.
47. Another political challenge is that in recent years there has been a tendency to reach for qualification reform as a key (and supposedly easy) lever to improve school and college outcomes. However, the new 16-19 study programme has already been described by Ofsted as 'very clear' and fit for purpose. The task ahead is in implementing it so that every post-16 learner has a clear progression plan, and particularly so that those without Level 2 qualifications in English and Maths at 16 are intensively supported to attain these as quickly as possible. The strategy detailed in this minute would achieve this, and we recommend the Secretary of State does not attempt further curriculum reform.
48. A third and more practical challenge may be improving transitions for specific groups where NEET proportions are the highest. These include young parents, care leavers, offenders, young people with disabilities and those with challenging behaviours in school. Alongside the actions proposed in this note, the Secretary of State may need to develop targeted strategies in order to improve outcomes for them.
49. A final barrier to action may be the view that NEET numbers are already in decline, although there is no reason to believe that they will decline below the levels which were present throughout the 2000s prior to the recession. A cyclical decline in NEETs

during the economic recovery does not fix the structural problem. Our view is that, rather than reducing the priority of tackling the NEET issue in what are better economic conditions, we have the opportunity to make a step change in the approach and banish the concept of NEETs to history. This is a strong reason for creating a strategy quickly and setting an aggressive target.

If you would like to know more about how you could help more young people to succeed in school, find and keep a job and achieve their potential, please get in touch.

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