

Rt Hon. Pat McFadden

Secretary of State - Department of
Work & Pensions
House of Commons
London
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CC: Rt Hon. Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

10th March 2026
Email Only

As representatives of young people, system leaders and as individuals, we are writing to ask the UK Government to review the continued use of the term “NEET” (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in official reporting and policy language.

We, as a society, have succeeded. Succeeded in defining a million young people by what they are not.
Not in education.

Not in employment.

Not in training.

“NEET” sounds technical. Neutral. Sensible. It isn’t. It’s a narrative we have chosen to exploit, and it begins with absence.

946,000 young people aged 16 to 24 carry this label. Yet 61% are economically inactive as they are actively caring for someone, managing their health, or navigating complex barriers. Not because they lack ambition, but because life is complex.

Still, we reduce them to a deficit, a label.

30% are disabled. Disabled young people are almost four times more likely to be given the label.

Looked-after children account for 51% of the long-term NEET population, despite being just 11% of their peers. Youth unemployment sits at 15.3%, significantly higher than the rest of the workforce.

We call this measurement, but in reality it’s subliminal messaging. Messaging matters. Labels shape identity. Identity shapes behaviour. Behaviour shapes outcomes.

Over time, “NEET” becomes more than a category. It becomes an identity capital deficit. A quiet erosion of confidence and credibility at the very moment adulthood begins. The lifetime earnings loss associated with that status is estimated at £1 million.

We are writing off human potential at scale. So let’s change the frame. Not NEET. LEET: Looking for Education, Employment or Training.

Not absent. Looking.

Not disengaged. Seeking.

Not a problem to fix. Ready to act.



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“Reframing how we talk about young people, is key to seeing change. In order for us to be able to support young people, we need to be able to identify the core issues. Pulling nearly 1 million young people into a single category does not help us do that. NEET to LEET, will help us move away from being problem based, to seeing what young people are, full of potential.” says Dr Shantanu Kundu, Chief Executive - Be Free Campaign.

Rebranding? No, accuracy. It acknowledges effort. It recognises agency. It shifts responsibility from the individual to the systems that are failing them.

As more young people navigate an unpredictable job market and shifting educational paths, the systems meant to support them must stop limiting them. The #FromNEETtoLEET campaign will push across the country, challenging government departments, local authorities, and charities to adopt this language, and to see young people for what they are, which is actively looking, striving, and ever more capable. At the Be Free Campaign, we call on government and public bodies to adopt LEET in official reporting and policy language. A word will not solve inequality. But it can stop reinforcing it.

Nearly a million young people are already looking. It’s time we stopped pretending they aren’t. We therefore call on the UK Government to take the following steps:

- Review the continued use of the term “NEET” across national statistics, policy frameworks, and public reporting, recognising the potential harm caused by deficit-based labels.
- Pilot the use of asset-based language such as “LEET” (Looking for Education, Employment or Training) within government communications, youth employment strategies, and local authority reporting.

Yours sincerely,

On Behalf of the Be Free Campaign, partners and young people
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