

Policy Insights Unit

Helping government develop analysis
and ideas for policy

enquiries@policyinsightsunit.gov.uk



Policy Insights Unit



About us

The Policy Insights Unit (PIU) is a government team that develops analysis and ideas for policy.

We operate like an in-house consultancy, delivering projects for colleagues across government and charging them to recover our costs.

We have four university partners – Brunel, Lancaster, Surrey and York – but we work with academics and industry experts worldwide.

If you'd like to discuss a project, please email us at enquiries@policyinsightsunit.gov.uk.

Summary

Our mission: we help government develop analysis and ideas for policy.

What we offer: high-quality analysis, ideas and advice, usually via projects lasting 3-12 months.

Who delivers it: our team of experienced officials leads and delivers all our work, engaging and collaborating with outside experts as needed.

Who we work with: all government departments and ALBs.

How we work: we engage experts through workshops and interviews, synthesise research, undertake original analysis and develop policy options.

How to commission us: we're part of the Civil Service so there's no lengthy procurement process if you'd like to commission us. It can take as little as a week to scope and agree work.

2016

Established

2.5k+

Experts engaged

4

University partners

50+

Staff

150+

Projects delivered

55%

Average saving compared to commissioning a project from outside government

900+

Organisations consulted

30+

Government customers

What we offer

Analysis, ideas, advice

We operate like an in-house consultancy, working across government to deliver high-quality analysis and advice for colleagues.

We agree bespoke projects to suit the needs of each customer, often combining expert engagement with research synthesis and policy development.

Our core services:

Expert engagement

We engage experts on your behalf, organising interviews, workshops and other events as needed

Analysis & ideas

We translate complex research into clear insights and actionable ideas

Policy development

We work alongside you to develop policy proposals that reflect both expert advice and practical constraints

How we work



We use a range of research and policy development tools:

evidence reviews / problem diagnosis / theory of change workshops / data analysis / applied research / benchmarking / options development / implementation roadmaps / workshops / seminars / visits / conferences

To get started, just send us an email and we'll arrange a call to talk through your requirements.

Some **examples** of our work



AI in education

We worked with DfE colleagues on AI in schools for more than 18 months. In a stream of related projects, we engaged experts, organised events, reviewed evidence, provided advice, and created guidance for schools and edtech developers.



Energy efficiency

Working with DESNZ for over a year, we delivered a series of projects on how government can improve non-domestic energy efficiency. Our work allowed the commissioning team to shift away from external consultants, saving them money without sacrificing quality.



Intercultural relationships

In a three-month project, our team worked with academics, practitioners and officials to develop advice for colleagues tasked with building relationships and influencing overseas. The framework we created has since been integrated into official FCDO training.

Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Young people not in employment, education or training evidence review

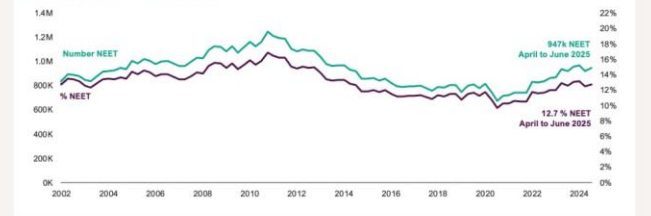
Policy Insights Unit



Making the case for change

The NEET rate has been steadily increasing in recent years, from 9.7% in 2021 to 12.7% in 2025

Number NEET and NEET rate of 16 to 24 year olds, UK



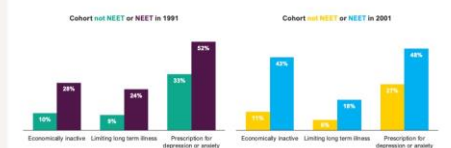
Source: Office for National Statistics, [Young people NEET time series](#)

We worked with DWP to produce an evidence review on the drivers of the NEET rate.

In ten weeks we produced a data-led report that has been used to brief ministers and special advisers. It has also fed into the ongoing work of both the Milburn Review and the Opportunity Mission.

Being NEET as a young person has scarring effects on both health and employment prospects that continue much later in life

Likelihood of outcomes in 2011 based on NEET status in 1991 and 2001, Scotland*



Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of [Open Innovation evidence review](#)

The risk of NEET status for young people is far higher in some parts of the country than others, worsening regional inequalities

NEET risk score by local authority, 2023



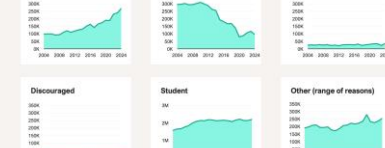
16 to 24 NEET rate by region, 2024



Source: Youth Futures Foundation, [NEET Predicting NEET risk scores generated from data on risk factors](#), higher scores indicate a higher chance of a young person being or becoming NEET

Between 2010 and 2020, growing levels of sickness-related inactivity were offset by a fall in teenage pregnancy, which may have hit its natural floor

Long-term sickness, Looking after family/home, Short-term sickness, Discouraged, Student, Other (range of reasons)

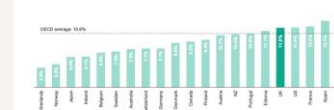


Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of Office for National Statistics, [Annual Population Survey](#) all data is for 16 to 24 year olds in the UK

Understanding the drivers

The UK is not an outlier relative to comparator countries, but its NEET rate is above the OECD average

NEET rate for 15 to 24 year olds in select OECD countries, 2023



Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of [Open Innovation evidence review](#)

The NEET rate has risen most sharply among those aged 21 to 24, the age group that is most relevant to the labour market

% NEET by age group, England



Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of Department for Business, [NEET rates by age group, England](#)

Rising inactivity has been driven by a persistent growth in long-term sickness, and NEETs are now twice as likely to have a health condition

% 16 to 24 with health condition*



Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of Department for Business, [NEET rates by age group, England](#)

Digital exclusion is disproportionately cutting some groups of young people out of the labour market

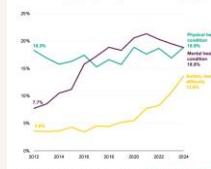
Digital exclusion among NEETs



Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of Department for Business, [NEET rates by age group, England](#)

Understanding NEET health trends

The share of NEET young people with a mental health condition as their primary health condition increased significantly between 2010 and 2023, before a slight decline in 2024. The share of NEET young people with a long-term health condition as their primary health condition has also increased significantly since 2010.



Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of Department for Business, [NEET rates by age group, England](#)

People from some family backgrounds face structural disadvantages that make them significantly more likely to be NEET

Family background is an intergenerational predictor of a young person's risk of becoming NEET. Young people from low-income families are more likely to be NEET. Young people from low-income families are also more likely to have a health condition. Young people from low-income families are also more likely to be NEET. Young people from low-income families are also more likely to be NEET.

Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of Department for Business, [NEET rates by age group, England](#)

Though the headline NEET rate is comparable for men and women, their reasons for being NEET tend to be very different

Higher levels of NEET young people are seen in those with a health condition. Young people with a health condition are more likely to be NEET. Young people with a health condition are more likely to be NEET. Young people with a health condition are more likely to be NEET.

Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of Department for Business, [NEET rates by age group, England](#)

Very few young people have interacted with the criminal justice system, but those that have are at high risk of becoming NEET

Higher levels of NEET young people are seen in those with a health condition. Young people with a health condition are more likely to be NEET. Young people with a health condition are more likely to be NEET. Young people with a health condition are more likely to be NEET.

Source: Open Innovation Team analysis of Department for Business, [NEET rates by age group, England](#)

What our **customers** say about us

“

[PIU] **helped us make sense of a very complex and technical area.** Their research and options development positively shaped our thinking and resulted in concrete next steps for policy development.

Department for Energy
Security and Net Zero

“

The team's expertise in research and reporting was evident throughout, and their **flexibility and genuine interest** ensured a smooth, consistent collaboration.

Office for Product
Safety & Standards

“

The team are extremely good at taking on a brief and making it their own. Their **professionalism and research outputs have gone above and beyond** our brief and overall objectives.

Department
for Education

We're part of a growing **range of services** operated by the Open Innovation Team



Evaluation Services Unit

Making it quicker, easier and more affordable for the Civil Service to deliver high-quality evaluations.

Contact us about evaluations:
enquiries@evaluationservices.gov.uk



Systems Insight Team

Helping teams tackle complex policy and delivery challenges using systems thinking.

Contact us about systems thinking:
netzerosystems@energysecurity.gov.uk



AI Adoption Unit

Helping civil servants turn curiosity about generative AI into safer, faster and higher-quality ways of working.

Contact us about AI adoption:
enquiries@openinnovation.gov.uk

Contact us

If you have a policy challenge and
you think we could help, get in touch

e enquiries@policyinsightsunit.gov.uk

li [linkedin.com/company/open-innovation-team](https://www.linkedin.com/company/open-innovation-team)

w [gov.uk/government/organisations/open-innovation-team](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/open-innovation-team)



Policy Insights Unit

