

Media Statement

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## **OUT OF SIGHT: How we lost track of thousands of NEETs and how we can transform their prospects**

- **56,000 NEETs have gone missing from local statistics**
- **Low success rates in English and Maths key determinant of NEET status - 80% of 18 year old NEETs lack five A\*-C GCSEs including English and Maths**
- **Only 1 in 6 of those who lack A\*-C English and Maths go on to acquire them in FE colleges**

A new Fabian pamphlet, supported by Impetus-PEF and Unite West Midlands, 'Out of Sight', by Richard Brooks, former director of strategy at OFSTED, reveals that 56,000 NEETs have gone missing from local statistics. This is the result of a huge rise in the number of school leavers whose destination is unknown by local councils – a number that has more than doubled from 92,000 in 2010 to 162,000 in 2013. According to Brooks' research anything up to half of these 'unknown' young people are not in education, employment or training.<sup>1</sup>

'Out of Sight' also calls into a question the public perception of NEETs, **challenging the idea that they form a "hard to reach" group**. Citing evidence from local authority case studies, Brooks points out that fewer than one in four of the 18-year-old NEETs are from low-income families or have special educational needs. In contrast, 80 per cent of them lacked five GCSE A\*-C grades including English and maths.

Brooks writes: *"We are in thrall to a profoundly misleading idea that NEETs are troubled, excluded and even dangerous. In fact most young people who become NEET at the age of 18 look very average in most respects. Only a small number 'drop out' after leaving school. Most stay on, usually at further education colleges, for two more years of education.*

*"Their defining characteristic is the lack of skills and qualifications – especially in English and mathematics – that are the passport to secure and decent employment. The key to really reducing NEET numbers lies in ensuring that many more young people develop their core skills and qualifications."*

Brooks also raises questions about the role of further education colleges, noting that only **one out of every six 19 year olds who left school without A\*-C grades in English and Maths** gain these qualifications while at college. Brooks writes:

*"Most of the 18-year-old NEETs are not invisible when they are 16 and 17. Many are attending an FE college. They are sitting in front of lecturers, in classrooms and workshops, following their courses. A relatively small number of publicly funded institutions have direct access to many of the young people who will subsequently end up unemployed.*

*“The FE sector has improved its performance equipping young people with the core skills they need in literacy and numeracy. But we simply have to aim higher than one in six [19 year olds not gaining English and Maths qualifications]. We could and should make sure that every young person is at least studying for suitably challenging English and maths qualifications.”*

Responding to the research, **Jenny North, Director of Policy and Strategy of Impetus-PEF** said: *“This report really highlights the importance of getting key qualifications to avoid becoming NEET. It’s not good enough that only 60% of pupils currently achieve A\*-C in English and Maths at 16. It’s even more of a scandal that, of the 40% who don’t, so few are given a fair crack of the whip at getting them by the time they’re 19. Educational attainment is the key to employment and at the moment our educational system, both pre- and post-16, is failing more young people than we realised.”*

### **Ends - Notes to editors**

<sup>1</sup> The government currently assumes that one in eight of those with an unknown destination are NEET. In-depth research from Coventry shows that anything up to a half are likely to be out of education, employment or training.

Richard Brooks is available for interview and comment. Please contact Richard Speight on 0207 227 4906 / 07794 307840 / [richard.speight@fabians.org.uk](mailto:richard.speight@fabians.org.uk) to arrange. ‘Out of Sight’ is supported by Impetus-PEF and Unite West Midlands

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