

SCRUTINY REPORT

**MEETING: CYP
Scrutiny Committee**

DATE: 15/09/2026

**SUBJECT:
NEET Update**

**REPORT FROM:
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1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 National Context

Recent years have seen increased national attention on young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), reflecting concerns about the long-term impact that disengagement can have on life chances, skills development, employment outcomes and economic growth.

Whilst national debate increasingly considers participation and NEET outcomes across a broader age range, including young adults aged 18 to 24, local authority statutory duties remain focused on the participation and tracking of young people of academic age 16 and 17.

Accordingly, this report focuses on the cohort for which Bury Council has statutory responsibility, namely young people in Year 12 and Year 13.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education, employment or training and to maintain accurate records of their participation status.

1.2 Understanding Participation Measures

The participation measure comprises three categories:

- Education, Employment or Training (EET)
- Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
- Not Known

When assessing performance, NEET and Not Known should be considered together as representing those young people whose participation outcomes are not secured.

1.3 Seasonal Nature of NEET Performance

NEET figures fluctuate throughout the academic year and follow a predictable pattern. Historically, the lowest levels of NEET are seen between December and February. Following Easter and towards the end of the academic year, NEET figures typically rise as young people

complete courses, leave employment, or move between destinations before progressing into further learning, training or work.

As a result, changes in NEET performance during the year do not necessarily indicate a deterioration in overall performance. The performance data within section 2 is compiled from the DfE published 'NEET Scorecard' which takes an average of Dec 2025, Jan 2026 and Feb 2026 submitted data.

1.4 Participation

Participation measures the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds engaged in education, employment or training in line with the Raising of the Participation Age legislation.

Bury's participation rate currently stands at 91.3%, which is broadly in line with the North West average of 91.4% and slightly below the England average of 92.0%. Participation has increased by 1.1 percentage points compared to the previous reporting period.

Whilst participation legislation places an expectation on young people to remain engaged in education or training until age 18, there are limited powers available to enforce this requirement. Consequently, support and engagement activity remain the primary mechanisms through which participation is promoted.

1.5 NEET and Not Known

NEET and Not Known provide a measure of those young people who are not currently participating or whose activity cannot be confirmed.

Bury's current position is:

Year	Cohort Size	NEET + Not Known %	NEET %	Not Known %
2019	4,362	4.0%	3.7%	0.3%
2020	4,488	4.0%	3.7%	0.3%
2021	4,554	3.5%	3.3%	0.3%
2022	4,567	3.6%	3.4%	0.2%
2023	4,594	3.9%	3.9%	0.0%
2024	4,811	4.0%	3.8%	0.2%
2025	4,996	4.1%	4.0%	0.0%
2026	5,102	4.3%	4.3%	0.1%

Bury's current NEET rate of 4.3% is lower than both the North West average (5.5%) and the England average (5.8%), putting Bury in quintile 2 this year. The authority's Not Known rate is significantly below both regional (1.3%) and national (2.4%) comparators, providing confidence that the local authority has a robust understanding of the participation status of young people across the borough.

The DfE published 'NEET scorecard' shows Bury's NEET rate increased by 0.2 percentage points compared with the previous reporting year. Over the same period, the North West average decreased by 0.2 percentage points, whilst the England average increased by 0.2 percentage points.

Statistical Neighbour Comparisons:

Authority	NEET + Not Known
Bexley	2.7
Bury	4.3
North Tyneside	4.4
Nottinghamshire	4.4
Cornwall	5.7
Norfolk	5.8
Lancashire	6.0

Stockton-on-Tees	7.1
Kent	8.0
Medway	10.8
Dudley	12.7

Although there has been a small increase in the local NEET rate, Bury continues to perform better than both regional and national comparators and maintains exceptionally low levels of Not Known young people. This provides confidence that performance reflects an accurate picture of participation across the borough.

1.6 Vulnerable Groups

Whilst overall participation rates remain strong, the risk of becoming NEET is not evenly distributed across the young person population.

	Vulnerable Group NEET/NK*	EHCP NEET/NK	SEN Support NEET/NK
Bury	20.7%	11.0%	8.7%
Statistical Neighbour Average	26.4%	10.8%	10.1%
North West	26.8%	11.2%	10.3%
England	26.4%	9.9%	10.0%

*includes LAC, Refugee/Asylum Seekers, Carers – not own child, Disclosed substance misuse, Care leaver, YOT, Parent – not caring for own child, Alternative provision and mental health flags

Young people identified as belonging to a vulnerable group account for 4.2% of Bury's academic age 16 and 17 cohort, which is broadly in line with the statistical neighbour average (3.9%) and the North West average (4.3%), although higher than the England average (2.9%). Young people within this group have a combined NEET and Not Known rate of 20.7%. Whilst this remains a significant challenge, Bury performs more favourably than the statistical neighbour average (26.4%), the North West average (26.8%) and the England average (26.4%). This suggests that, whilst Bury experiences similar levels of vulnerability to comparable areas, outcomes for these young people compare positively against regional, national and statistical neighbour benchmarks.

Educational needs are also a significant factor in determining participation outcomes. Young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) have a combined NEET and Not Known rate of 11.0%, which is broadly in line with the statistical neighbour average (10.8%) and the North West average (11.2%), although slightly higher than the England average (9.9%).

Young people receiving SEN Support have a combined NEET and Not Known rate of 8.7%, compared to the statistical neighbour average of 10.1%, 10.3% across the North West and 10.0% nationally.

By comparison, young people without an identified SEND need have a NEET and Not Known rate of 3.2%, illustrating the additional barriers faced by many young people with SEND and other vulnerabilities.

These figures demonstrate that, whilst Bury performs broadly in line with or better than statistical neighbour, regional and national comparators for many vulnerable groups, a disproportionate number of young people who become NEET continue to come from cohorts facing additional barriers to participation. This reinforces the importance of targeted support through Connexions, transition planning, the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, re-engagement provision and partnership working across education, training and support services.

2.0 Issues

2.5 Supporting Young People into Positive Destinations

Bury Council's Connexions Service has responsibility for tracking the participation status of all young people of academic age 16 and 17 and providing targeted support to those at risk of becoming NEET or who are already NEET.

This includes maintaining contact with young people, identifying appropriate opportunities and providing information, advice and guidance to support progression into education, employment and training. The exceptionally low Not Known rate achieved by Bury reflects the effectiveness of these tracking arrangements and provides confidence in the quality of local participation data.

Alongside its statutory tracking function, the service also delivers targeted re-engagement support through the Future:Ready programme, funded through Greater Manchester devolved funding arrangements. The programme supports young people who are NEET to develop confidence, skills and employability skills before progressing into sustainable education, employment or training opportunities.

Members should note that young people participating in re-engagement provision are recorded within the Department for Education's participation measures as participating and therefore count as EET. Whilst this reflects meaningful engagement, many participants are actively working towards a longer-term destination and some demand may therefore be less visible within headline NEET statistics.

2.6 Growth in the Number of Young People

A significant challenge facing the local system is the increasing number of young people within the participation cohort.

The academic age 16 and 17 population recorded increased from approximately 4,565 young people in March 2022 to 5,116 in March 2026, representing an increase of over 12% over the period.

Whilst increasing demand affects all parts of the post-16 system, it can have the greatest impact on young people who require additional support to engage and sustain participation. Competition for places, limited specialist provision and reduced flexibility within the system can create additional barriers for vulnerable young people, reinforcing the importance of maintaining a broad range of accessible education, training and re-engagement opportunities.

2.7 Availability of Suitable Provision

Bury College has increased learner numbers in recent years and remains a key partner within the borough's post-16 education landscape. However, traditional Further Education provision is not suitable for all young people.

Each year a proportion of learners leave college before completing their programme, whilst others require more vocational, practical or specialist pathways than those typically available through a mainstream college environment.

The availability of alternative post-16 provision is a challenge that extends beyond Bury and is reflected across Greater Manchester and nationally. Whilst the Department for Education funds post-16 provision, there are currently limited mechanisms to encourage new providers into the market where gaps are identified.

Historically, Bury has been heavily reliant upon North Lancs Training Group (NLTG) as the principal provider of alternative vocational pathways for young people who may not be suited to a traditional college route.

2.8 Prevention and Early Intervention

The Council works closely with schools through a range of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) activities. This includes the annual Bury Careers Event, bringing together employers, training providers and education establishments to help young people understand the

breadth of pathways available to them. The Council also facilitates a local CEIAG network and regular communications with schools to ensure education providers remain informed about developments within post-16 education, training and employment opportunities. These activities support schools in delivering high-quality careers education and preparing young people for informed post-16 choices.

The Council works alongside the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) to support schools in meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks and continually improving careers provision. The Gatsby Benchmarks provide a national framework for high-quality careers guidance, covering areas such as employer engagement, encounters with further and higher education providers, workplace experiences and linking learning to future careers. Through the local Careers Hub, Careers Leaders from schools and colleges are brought together to share good practice, collaborate on common challenges and access support to strengthen careers programmes.

The Council also coordinates the Bury Menu, which provides schools and colleges with access to a range of careers, employability and enrichment activities delivered by employers and partner organisations to complement existing careers programmes and broaden young people's exposure to the world of work. Schools are additionally supported through destination tracking information, helping them understand post-16 outcomes and use this intelligence to evaluate careers provision and identify areas for improvement. The Council recently established the Employers in Education initiative further strengthening links between education providers and local employers, helping schools access careers talks, mock interviews, mentoring opportunities, workplace encounters and other employer-led activities.

Connexions Advisers undertake Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) activity with schools to identify young people who may be at increased risk of becoming NEET. This enables additional support and targeted interventions to be put in place before young people leave compulsory education. The approach forms part of a broader preventative model that seeks to address barriers at an early stage rather than waiting until a young person becomes disengaged. Similar arrangements are being extended through the sharing of Risk of NEET information with Bury College from September 2026 to help identify learners who may require additional support to sustain their participation.

The Council also supports schools through targeted work experience opportunities and workplace engagement activities. Bury Council's work experience programme seeks to support young people who may otherwise struggle to secure a placement, enabling them to gain valuable experience and develop employability skills. Alongside this, Workplace Safari visits hosted within the Council, provide young people with first-hand experience of different work environments and help broaden their understanding of local employment opportunities.

The Council is also actively engaging with emerging careers activity in primary education. Through work led by the Careers and Enterprise Company, new Partnership and Quality Leads have been appointed to support primary schools across Greater Manchester. A number of Bury schools have already participated in pilot activity designed to help schools develop more structured approaches to careers-related learning, aspiration raising and employer engagement at an earlier age.

Particular emphasis is placed on supporting vulnerable groups. The Virtual School works closely with education providers and partners to support children in care and care experienced young people through Personal Education Plans, assessing risk of NEET through Attendance monitoring from Reception to the end of Year 11. In addition, the Virtual School employs a dedicated post 16 advisor who, working with Connexions, provides additional support to help young people navigate key educational transitions, sustain participation and successfully progress into further education, training and employment opportunities whether they are living in or out of borough. As young people move into adulthood, support continues through Plan on a Page (POPs) arrangements and dedicated 18+ Education, Employment and Training (EET) support, helping ensure aspirations, progression goals and support needs remain visible and coordinated across services and features heavily as a priority in the Corporate Parenting Plan and Children and Young People's improvement plan. The Council has also strengthened its approach to Preparing for Adulthood for young people with SEND, ensuring that transition planning forms a key component of Annual

Reviews from Year 9 onwards, supporting young people and their families to prepare for future education, employment and independent living outcomes

2.9 Developing New Opportunities

Alongside this preventative activity, Bury continues to invest in targeted support and additional opportunities for young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

Through Local Authority Grant devolved funding, Bury Council's Connexions Service delivers the Future:Ready programme and commissions a range of targeted interventions designed to support young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. This funding provides additional staffing capacity, dedicated keyworker support, personalised interventions and access to bespoke opportunities that complement Connexions statutory service. The programme works with young people facing a range of barriers to participation, helping them progress into sustained education, employment and training opportunities.

The funding has also enabled the Council to commission a number of innovative short courses and engagement programmes aimed at supporting young people furthest from education, employment and training. This has included the Skills CC programme delivered in Radcliffe, which received national recognition and contributed to Bury Council receiving a national award.

The authority is also seeing encouraging developments within the local provider market, including:

- From September 2026, Bury Council will begin sharing Risk of NEET (RONI) information with Bury College to help identify students who may require additional support at an early stage, with the aim of improving retention and reducing the risk of disengagement.
- The Council also continues to work with schools to identify young people at an increased risk of becoming NEET, enabling earlier intervention and support before they leave compulsory education. Members should note that young people are more likely to be NEET in year 13 than immediate year after leaving school (Jan 2026 figures Yr12 2.8% NEET compared to Yr13 5.6%).
- A new partnership between YMCA and RAP Alternative Provision, delivering a dedicated programme from Bury FC aimed at engaging young people who are NEET.
- The introduction of a new NEET pathway at Bury College, providing additional in-year referral opportunities for young people. Historically, college enrolment opportunities have largely been concentrated at the start of the academic year.
- TechFirst AI offering provision from Sept 2026, working with employers including JD Sports to create progression pathways into digital careers and apprenticeships for a small cohort of young people.
- Ongoing work with Bury EST to develop additional opportunities specifically targeted at young people who are NEET.

These developments represent a positive expansion of local provision and are expected to strengthen the range of progression opportunities available to young people over the coming years. Nevertheless, the post-16 sector remains subject to significant change, including qualification reform and evolving funding priorities. Whilst these developments have the potential to improve progression routes for many young people, there is a need to ensure that those with additional barriers to participation are not disadvantaged by a reduction in flexible or alternative pathways.

2.10 Outcomes from Partnership Working and Transition Support

Whilst it is difficult to attribute participation outcomes to any single intervention, the range of preventative, transition and re-engagement activity delivered across the borough contributes to maintaining comparatively strong participation outcomes. Bury's combined NEET and Not Known rate remains below both regional and national averages, whilst the authority also maintains exceptionally low levels of Not Known young people, providing confidence in the robustness of

local tracking arrangements and partnership working between schools, colleges, training providers, employers and support services.

The impact of this collaborative approach should also be viewed in the context of increasing demand. Since 2019, the academic age 16 and 17 cohort has increased from approximately 4,362 young people to over 5,100, an increase of around 17%. Despite this growth, the combined NEET and Not Known rate has remained broadly stable, fluctuating between 3.5% and 4.3% over the period. This suggests that partnership activity, transition support and targeted interventions have helped maintain positive outcomes for young people despite increasing system pressures.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Performance in Bury around young people not in education, employment and training is comparatively strong when viewed against England as a whole or similar local authorities, but remains an area for improvement, especially for young people facing multiple disadvantages. Extensive work is being carried out to widen the opportunities available to Bury young people and to ensure that our young people are best placed to take advantage of them.

List of Background Papers:-

Contact Details:-

Ben Dunne, Director of Early Years, Education and Skills

Executive Director sign off Date: 10/09/2026

JET Meeting Date: _____